

THREE STEPS, ONE BOW

*Records of the Bowing Pilgrimage of
Bhikshus Heng Sure & Ch'au*

Bhikshu Heng Ch'au:

Christmas Eve:

To Help You on Your Way

A retired minister: "I served in the pastoral for over forty years... What if you don't find the peace you seek when you are done?" he asked.

"There's no end or beginning. We find it everyday in a sincere single mind--in the right here and now."

"Hmmm. Well, yes, I guess that's right, but I would never find it in the rain and mud," he said laughing.

"Even more so in the rain we find it. The harder the better."

A big powerful man in cowboy work clothes "You guys have a merry Christmas and thanks for prayin' for us." He made an offering and left with a big smile.

A family with four teenage children: "We've been looking for you for two days. We think what you're doing is marvelous, really for the good."

A bag of food appeared on the car with a note: "To help you on your way."

A big blue Cadillac stopped and a gentle, well-dressed man in his early fifties came over, and quietly watched us bow. Suddenly he became very happy and excited. He ran over to me extending his hand to shake. He gestured that he was deaf and dumb. I hesitated, showing him I was covered with mud and rain. A big smile came up right from his heart and spread all over his face. "Oh, what's a little mud at a time like this," he seemed to say. We shook--muddy monk and he in a blue suit with a flower in his lapel.

He knew Heng Sure didn't talk, and I think felt an affinity that went beyond words. He came right up to my face like a little child, and extended his hand. There wasn't the slightest trace of fear or phoniness about him. As we shook, he pointed with his other hand in the direction we were bowing (City of Ten Thousand Buddhas) as if to say, "I'm with you all the way, keep going."

I felt humbled and deeply happy that anyone could be so real and open without a second thought. He made an offering and then gave a look that went straight to the real and true place inside of me. When he knew we had touched in that place, he smiled as if to say, "Wonderful!" And then he left. Not a word was spoken.

"The Buddhadharma is subtle, wonderful and difficult to measure. All words and phrases cannot come up to it."

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA

Mesa Vision:

Who are we? In the morning I have been waking up and feeling I am not alone. I am in the midst of a new and bright understanding, but as I reach for it or try to look at it closely--Poof!--it's gone. Was it real or just a dream? Why did it feel so liberating and peaceful? Where did it go?

This morning it stayed awhile and I got to see it and feel it. A big relaxing deep smile, almost a laugh filled me. I saw: All of us and all the things in the universe are made up of billions upon billions of countless infinitesimal particles each with a consciousness and awareness of all things in the past, present, and future without beginning or end. These little particles, identical in size are so small they could never be seen by the human eye. As they are so small they are actually one substance that fills up the universe and pervades throughout all directions of space. Everything that ever was, is or will be, is already known and contained within each and all of these tiny dustmotes.

There really is no me or Heng Sure, no car or blankets, no wind, trees, town, or ocean. All is one and the same within an infinite variety and differentiation. These little atoms contain all without containing anything. Everything is made of these equal and omniscient little "things", without anything being made or existing whatsoever. No words could fully describe or capture this vision.

"My body further manifests bodies as many as dust motes in a Buddhaland. Each of which simultaneously bows to the Buddhas as many as dust motes in a Buddhaland. In each dust mote are Buddhas as many as dust motes. Everyone of which dwells in an assembly of Bodhisattvas.

Inexhaustibly throughout the Dharmarealm in every mote of dust, it is this way.

I deeply believe they are all filled with Buddhas."

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA

Conduct of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva

Chapter 40

I had the feeling of stumbling into a secret world that is always right here, but we can't see it even while immersed in it. I knew it was my boxed-in rational mind with all its attachments and discriminations that blinded me to the wonderful mystery of this always-so truth. It was like a rare animal of the forest that takes flight before anyone

gets close enough to even know of its existence. Maybe only the sun and moon and fog ever get to see it.

I feel full of mistakes yet happy beyond words. I am sitting with a good Dharma friend reading the *FLOWER ADORNMENT SUTRA* under a new Gwan Yin picture in our four-wheel Bodhimanda. We are camped on the edge of the Mesa in a dripping eucalyptus grove outside Oceana, Calif. It's Christmas Eve and a full moon. A lonely dog howls, and in the little town below a scratchy record keeps playing, "O, Come All Ye Faithful."

HENG SURE: December 25, 1978

Santa Claus Bodhisattva Cultivates the Perfection of Giving

In 1975 I took a big step and moved into the monastery. I held a job, working as a file clerk and joined the Gold Mountain assembly's activities the rest of the day. My resolve was firm, but my habits hadn't yet fully made the transition to a Buddhist way of life.

Christmas came and with it, the annual winter Amitabha meditation session which celebrates the birth of the Buddha of limitless light. Buddhist holidays are wonderful occasions, full of light and peace, but this was to be my first non-Christmas in twenty-four years. In my head I was prepared to miss the music, the trimmings and the spirit of the Noel season. I felt pretty lonely being new in the monastery. Even though my neighboring laymen down the hall were an open and supportive group and the monks were kind and patient, I saw the world through narrow-eyes. I was uptight and full of doubts, but determined to carry my decision out. There was truth in Buddhism and I was going to endure this rough time of emotion and change at the beginning and make my new home in the Dharma.

The session began on December 23rd, and the Buddhahall was filled night and day with the happy sound of voices praising the wisdom and compassion. Adults' voices, children's voices, men and women's voices chanting the holy name NAMO AMITABHA BUDDHA, NAMO AMITABHA BUDDHA. Each evening when the work was done we gave the merit of our work to all beings everywhere. Turing over the fruits of the work is true Buddhist giving. On Christmas Eve during a break in the ceremonies I was unpacking a trunk of clothes and found my old Christmas stocking. I had hung it on the mantelpiece every Christmas since I was five. It was red velvet with white trim and decorated with Christmas trees and wreaths made of green felt. I couldn't resist the urge to hang it on my door. It was Christmas eve and this was a Buddhist Monastery. I thought, "Here's the best way to break my old attachment to this stocking. You can't just drop it into the garbage. Hang it up. When the other laymen see it they'll take it down--they might even rip it up and throw it away for you. It's hard to part with it that way, but it's now or never." The Transference of Merit was done for the evening and I prepared for hoots of laughter as I tacked the old stocking onto the door of my room, on the monastery's third floor. I lay awake feeling pain of doubt: "Would I be ostracized from the new group? Shouldn't I just quietly store the

thing? Why obstruct everyone else with your attachments? You're just going to cause more false thoughts this way."

Sleep took me and visions of sugar plums filled my head, each plum gracefully walking and chanting NAMO AMITABHA BUDDHA.

Four A.M. Time for morning recitation. Fearing the worst: would my stocking cover the hallway torn to tiny bits? I opened the door and what to my wondering eyes should appear but the red velvet sock stuffed full of gifts. There were little Buddha images, tiny Sutra editions, new rolls of 35mm film, a tin of tiger balm, packs of hot chocolate, a toothbrush, a pocket-sized mantra, and a string of recitation beads. Someone had put effort into filling my Christmas stocking with wonderful treasures. I was stunned speechless. Far from ridiculing me, these men that I lived with had accepted, attachment to Christmas and all. I was the one with the narrow eyes and a narrow heart. My neighbors know how to give. They welcomed me without conditions. I felt humbled, subdued. My defenses and fears were so useless! Buddhism is big and open and inclusive. My views were tight and stingy and dark. As the session began on Christmas day the words NAMO AMITABHA BUDDHA filled my heart with light and I could not hold back the tears. It was still dark in the Buddhahall and no one could see my streaming eyes, but I had reason to hide my heart. Kuo-kuei, Kuo-fa, Dharma Master Kuan, and the others cracked open my fearful state. Their compassion and kindness to this new disciple of the Buddha taught me more about the true spirit of Buddhist giving in one night than my four years of studying "academic Buddhism" in the university had done. How far I had to go, how much to learn! And how good it feels to open the heart to the Buddha. NA MO E MI TOU FWO.

On San Bu I Bai everyday is like Christmas. We give our work to everyone when we transfer merit and offerings to the Triple Jewel coming from people in all walks of life. When our work gets sincere, we will disappear; offerings will pass right through



INTERROGATION ABOUT PURITY: The Teaching Acharya queries novices in matter of purity before giving his recommendation to the Upadhaya and Karmadana and the Certifying Masters during the recent Precept Transmission held in the Adorned Preceptat the City of 10,000 Buddhas.

two transparent monks and plant good roots in the field of blessings. Our work will generate itself without defilement or error and everyone will join together in the Flower Garland Ocean-wide Assembly of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

HENG CH'AU: December 26, 1978

"If one wishes to know all the Buddhas of the past, present, and future, contemplate the nature of the Dharmarealm--Everything is made from the mind alone."

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA

Sutra is a Sanskrit word which means "a tallying text." A sutra tells it like it really is. It matches up with the true principles of all Buddhas above and tallies with the hearts of living beings below.

Squeeze the sutras with a skeptical mind, and test them against your deepest experiences and you won't find them wanting or phoney any place. Sutras are permanent and unchanging. They were true in the past, and true in the present, and will be true in the future.

No one actually knows how old the *AVATAMSAKA SUTRA* is. Properly speaking it has no age, no beginning and no end. The principles of a sutra are within the minds of living beings. And each of us in our lives naturally probes and tests by trial and error until we get back to the root and tally with the source. So Heng Sure and I don't mind being asked a lot of question by children. It's natural.

Yesterday a little boy Jackie said, 'Anything's possible if you put your mind to it.' Although Jackie had never read a sutra or even "seen anything like this before," as he said from his bike, still he spoke true principle. His observation was a clear statement about Buddhism and the bowing pilgrimage. If you can concentrate and bring the mad mind to a stop, there is no place you won't penetrate and nothing you can't accomplish.

"Sure!" concluded Jackie. "It's all in your mind." Jackie was speaking Dharma. The Sutra was in his heart. Buddhas are made from people's minds.

HENG CH'AU: December 27, 1978

Dharma Protectors Answer When sincerity is Manifested.

A vicious guard dog charged us as we bowed past a farm house. We kept bowing and before long the dog just laid down and quietly watched us pass by.

Heavy rains continue. Creeks are flowing and gurgling. The hills and fields have come back to life in a burst of green.

We needed a special kind of rubber gloves to bow in the rain. The water pours down our sleeves. All our clothes are soaked. Since we vowed to camp outside, it's important

to keep as dry as possible. We can't hop into a hot shower and throw our clothes into the dryer at night. We debated buying some gloves but decided to bow instead and let things happen naturally. It doesn't feel right to go into a store and buy things for ourselves.

As we bowed past a liquor store, the owner came out and handed us two pairs of long sleeved yellow rubber gloves. They were exactly what we needed!

"Hope they help. Bless you!" he said.

Clear Circle of Sky

When we stop to eat and sleep it pours rain. When we go out to bow the rain lets up. For the last three days there's been a hole of blue sky above us in the midst of black rain clouds. At the end of today's bowing a storm hit--one of the heaviest I've ever seen. Within minutes the streets turned into rivers, flooding stores and houses. The road is starting to cave in and erode from underneath.

We made it to an empty laundromat and did t'ai chi between the washing machines while our clothes dried. "It's funny," I thought as I looked out at the flooded streets. "The world looks so solid and permanent, but in a snap of a finger it can all melt and float away right before your eyes." Sit says:

"All dharmas have no dwelling, No fixed location can be obtained."

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA
Verses in Praise on the Peak of Mount Sumeru
Chapter 14

-continued next issue

AVAILABLE NOW FROM BTTS

Flower Adornment Sutra

Chapter Nine: Light Enlightenment.

In this Chapter the Buddha emits light from the soles of his feet which illumines uncountable worlds. Manjushri Bodhisattvas throughout all the worlds thus illumined speak eloquent verses in praise of the Buddhas. 225 pages. \$8.50.