



Three Steps One Bow

Bhikshus Heng Sure and Heng Ch'au on their bowing pilgrimage to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas.

HENG CH'AU: November 1, 1977:
Lompoc, California

Early a.m. a young man earnestly and straight out said, "What can I say? Your dedication and courage in the Way has really touched me deeply. I was seriously thinking of dressing up like a mummy on Halloween and robbing a bank yesterday. Then I saw your pictures and read about you in the paper. I am very grateful. Thank you."

HENG CH'AU: November 2, 1977:

What writes? Who Reads?

"...After listening to the Sutra, Bodhidharma asked, "Dharma Master, what are you doing?"

"I am explaining Sutras," the Dharma Master replied.

"Why are you explaining Sutras?"

"I am teaching people to end birth and death."

"Oh?" said Bodhidharma, "exactly how do you do that? In the Sutra which you explain, the words are black and the paper is white. How does this teach people to end birth and death?"

SIXTH PATRIARCH SUTRA

The Buddhadharma is meant to be experienced not simply read about. Our writing is already a step removed from the direct experience. Reading it is two steps away. Words make differences where divisions don't originally exist. As the *AVATAMSAKA SUTRA* says it, "All the world's words are discriminations."

T.V. and movies are huge dream worlds. The more we watch, the more confused we get. It's so easy to become what we behold--to start seeing the world as if it were a novel or T.V. serial. In cultivation one

tries to gaze on the world and the mind first hand. I am very ashamed of my writing. "The words are black and the paper is white," how can anyone benefit from this? Yet, when I read the Sutras and listen to my teacher speak Dharma, these words, though still words, light up the Way.

"Within language is revealed the independent self mastery of all Buddhas. Proper Enlightenment surpasses language, and yet language, false though it is, is used to reveal Proper Enlightenment.

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA Chapter 24

Writing and talking have their place. When you are enlightened, you turn them. When you are a common person, like me, they turn you. Almost every time I speak or use a pen, I come to regret it.

Last month in L.A. I was frantically taking notes as the Master discussed the bowing trip with us. Right in the middle he stopped, reached over, and picked up the paper I was writing on. He held it up and examined it as if it were a rare document--slowly and with absorbed curiosity. "Oh," he said, "What's this?"

"Ah, ah, those are my notes, Shih fu, I'm taking notes." I answered nervously.

He paused and examined them minutely saying, "Hmm, Okay." All the while he held them upside down! Then smiling, the Master handed them back to me. I got the point. Says the Master, "Americans write down everything they hear."

Lompoc, Main street. Faith

"Thank you for all this divine energy you brought with you to our town. A lot of people can really feel it!" young mother.

"I am also a vegetarian and I said if I ever saw you, I would give you something because I understand what you are trying to do and I want to help." well dressed businesswoman.

During the noonday meal an elderly farmer in a straw hat slowly walks up and peeks in the car door. "Eating lunch, huh?" he says with a kind of smile. Then he stretches out his arm and hands in some folded money like no one is supposed to know and strolls away.

Mother out shopping: "I just wanted to say that even though I don't understand yet about the Buddha and where your hearts are to be able to do this, I hope to someday. I need to tell you this because I have been moved by what you are doing and when it's my good fortune to, I will join you."

A local high school science teacher drove out to give us a helpful roadside lecture on wild edible and poisonous plants in the area.

"Now that there between those two signs-the bright green one, right, is wild tobacco. About as bad for you as tame tobacco. No benefits!"

"We never touch the stuff."

"Good. Now if you boil the brown out of the acorn nuts they're ok--no leavening, but an edible flour. They take forever to boil."

"I think we'll skip those and use the time for bowing."

"Good. Now that cattail, especially this time of the year, has a deep root..." and so on he went for a good forty-five minutes.

He made a special trip out and went running all over the fields and along the dry creeks by the Santa Yves bridge for samples to illustrate. People give in all sorts of ways. He was making an offering of his skill and time. The same excitement and light was in his eyes that everyone shares who gives from the heart.

It's called faith.

People want to believe in wholesome things; that there can be peace and an end to disasters in the world. They want to be able to benefit others and have their own faith renewed that all of us can reach the other shore. In faith they come out to make offerings and to say, 'It's for real, isn't it? We all can make it. I feel good in my heart.'

"Faith is the source of the Path and the mother of merit and virtue. It nurtures and raises all wholesome Dharmas. It cuts through the net of doubts and leaves the flow of love. It opens up the highest road to Nirvana."

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA

Chapter 12, Part I

HENG SURE: November, 1977:

Naturally Uptight and in the Center of It

Heng Ch'au called me on some obvious outflows of self: stiff posture, energy high in the shoulders, fussiness over the body, etc. He said, "I know that we both opened a great deal this last weekend at Gold Wheel and now we're holding on, trying not to retreat."

I wrote in reply, "I expanded to a new level at Gold Wheel. Now what I learned is contracting naturally and it will return to a new center when it's ready. It's okay."

I'm just watching myself go naturally uptight, letting it go and not trying to hold on to yesterday's openness. That would be an attachment and not true. The truth is, I really am uptight and kind of enjoying watching it happen. I'm not uptight about feeling uptight. I'm not afraid of losing anything anymore. It's all out of my conscious control. I think that's the covering that got broken off and opened up and now I'm just feeling uptight.

As for retreating, the middle is not a uptight that you advance to or retreat from. It's the dynamic, total center of wherever you are working. Attachments keep you from really working and that is no longer the middle.

Vows motivate the working center one way or another; precepts give it form and strength, substance, fuel, and clarity; and faith give birth to it each day.

And the teacher: He lets it all live long enough as a working unit that's moving straight and true within the rules, then it will find its center in the work and be of use.

This is a brand-new understanding and the openness never really leaves, the uptightness is always there. They take turns moving me, two sides of one circle, until I break out of it.

HENG CH'AU: November 3, 1977:

The First Door to Freedom

Last night three or four families drove out with money and food offerings. "Please accept this" and "just a little to help you out." A poor family offered a big box of food. You know they meant it.

They were all so happy and light! Why? Because like Heng Sure and myself, they were "entering the Buddhadharmā." Together we are all discovering that Buddhism is for real; that it is the teaching and nature of all beings. It is not negative. The principles of the Buddhadharmā are the best and highest in the hearts of all of us. There is no discrimination and arrogance. There is no anger or criticism or rejection. The Buddhadharmā accords with the wishes of living beings and doesn't beg or convert. It says, "We want only for all living beings everywhere to be able to awaken to their original and enlightened pure nature, to end all suffering, and to obtain the peace and happiness they seek. Let all beings live in harmony and treat each other with respect and compassion."

It is like there is a little light in all of us, call it faith, that recognizes without a moment's thought these principles and we are drawn to them like iron filings to a magnet.

"...Faith has no turbidity, no stain, it purifies the mind, it eradicates arrogance, it is the basis of respect..."

"...With faith one can give and the mind will not be stingy. With faith one can happily enter the Buddhadharmā..."

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA Chapter 12, Part I

It has been so long since this kind of bright light has been seen that all of us at first are stunned and even suspicious. But faith is strong and slowly it starts to thaw our frozen hearts and light up our cloudy minds.

"...Faith's power is solid, nothing can destroy it..."

Jim Bone, the deputy from the Sheriff's Dept. stopped to check on us. He has been reading about Buddhism and had some practical questions about life on the road. "How do you guys survive without violence? I mean, this area is full of 'weirdos' and bizarre crimes not to mention the local cowboys who are probably going to really give you hassles."

We explained that not killing, stealing, or engaging in sexual misconduct, not having a loose tongue and avoiding intoxicants is our self-defense.

"Obviously it works. The guys in the dept. can't figure out how you manage to stay in one piece."

Jim said he knows for himself that Buddhism is "it" but, "I can't put down girls."

"Anyway, We'll be keeping an eye out for you. You have any needs or problems or anything just call and I'll be there," he said.

(Later in a car ride with the Master to L.A. I related this exchange. When I mentioned Jim's line about knowing Buddhism was "it" but couldn't "put down girls" the Master commented with a smile "He can't put down men. Putting down men and women is the same. You can't see through the emptiness of others because you can't see through the emptiness of self. So your self attaches and grasps at others...Tell him to come to Gold Mountain and put it down.")

Food and sex are the root, primal ego supports. Learning to turn them and not be turned by them is the key to the "great reversal." It's really difficult, the hardest and most wonderful work I've ever done or imagined. When the six roots of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind are gathered in and "returned," things start to open up and get interesting.

It finally happened. I was late so much I didn't "earn" lunch! Results: The ego went into a rage. I never thought it could be so hard. All afternoon I was false thinking about food and looking outside and grasping. I even picked up a broken piece of car mirror on the roadside and looked at myself "just checking, am I still here?" Squirm, scream, and tantrum.

Every pore and ounce of skill and strength I can muster is being used to subdue the self. At the end of the day, total exhaustion. What an experience! Maybe I am using too much force and not enough patience?

An old van pulls up. Bennie, a stocky muscular man who looks and talks like a boxer and has a heart of gold, steps out and says, "I've seen you guys all the time--but we were always on different sides of the road. Pure mind! That's what it takes...pure mind! You set your mind to it and you can do anything."

Bennie has the energy of a nine year old. As he talks, he's dancing and moving around full of excitement.

"I know this. This is where it's at (pointing to his head). You got it! You guys are going to make it, see. I know you will. I respect that. Anybody can use his mind like that, I respect." Bennie reaches out to shake hands. He's clean and real and having fun.

"Yeah, this sure is something. You're going to make it all the way." He announces jabbing a right hook with his fist into the air and a wink, "You hang in there! I'll be seeing you again. I'll bring some food next time."

A man who had bicycled down from Oregon stopped to share road information and gave us a "special vegetarian" nut and seed mixture he swore would help us get to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas in top form. "That's quite a commitment!" he added.

HENG SURE: November, 1977:

Gold Wheel Weekend :

Sense of violent bouncing back and forth in and out of control, i.e. working or not working. While bowing or reciting or meditating I make progress and feel clean. I take rest in the work.

While talking with the Master or reading or eating I lose concentration, drift from the work and the self returns. Had a moment of clarity in the car riding back. Felt the Master totally relaxed and all there, waiting for me to quite being uptight in my life and to come join him. His words are astounding, "One of my disciples now has heads on top of heads, like Kuan Yin Bodhisattva, all of them with their eyes open. That takes samadhi power to sustain and a significant absence of sexual desire." Wow!