

Three Steps One Bow

Daily Records by Bhikshus Heng Sure & Heng Ch'au

HENG CH'AU: November, 1977:

When True, Protection Comes

A kind little old man stopped this a.m. He was worried and "thought about us all night" because of the road we are on. It's all hills and tight curves with no shoulder for the next ten miles. "It's just too dangerous," he finally said. "I think what you are doing is 100% right and wonderful. I strongly urge you to take this other road. It's much safer."

A little while later two men stop with similar advice. These people had something special and different about them from the other people who stop. It's in their eyes and vibes. Their eyes are clear and deep and their vibes familiar and at ease. Unusually so. (The Master, hearing of these encounters, commented, "These are your Dharma Protectors. You should listen to them. They have come to help you.")

An elderly white-haired woman walked up with two apples and a fresh, big, clean smile. "Peace my friends."

"I think it's far out what you're doing. It takes a lot of...I don't know. I think it's far out." (Young woman on Highway One north of Lompoc.)

On our right is a quiet grove of Eucalyptus trees and smiling people from Lompoc coming out to wish us well and make offerings to the Triple Jewel. On our left is barbed wire fence behind which is the "bam, thud, boom" of exploding shells from Vandenberg Air Force Base.

"The way of people is harmony,
With merit and error interspersed.
On virtuous deeds you rise, offenses make you fall,
It has nothing to do with anyone else at all."

THE TEN DHARMA REALMS

Ch'an Master Hua

Surprise! The Master drove all the way out from Los Angeles with some laypeople to pick us up and take us to Gold Wheel Temple. Seeing the Master with his bright robes and sash and wise and awesome deportment at the gas station we had just bowed past a few days ago is a mind blower! The laypeople were rushing around with Dharma Master Tao, getting the cars arranged as we bowed to Shih fu next to the gas pumps. Two young attendants were dumbstruck, staring. A happening all of us will remember for who knows how long? That's the way it is in the presence of the Master: whatever happens deep and is not seen forgotten. And always expect the unexpected!

"Without any distinctions made and without any fuss, in an instant's thought he pervades everywhere like the moonlight which falls on all places. He transforms the flocks of beings with measureless expedient means."

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA

Chapter 12, Part I

HENG SURE: November 1977:

Transform All, for One

Saturday morning we pass through a major attack of the yin drips and chills. Feels like a purge. Heading toward health. I really do nearly stop cultivating when my feet hit this soft carpet and my ears hear conversation, especially Chinese language. It brings out the old self and I forget the high ground and sink into the valley. What happens? Who is it? I know there will be an end to it, it waits ahead of more work. There will be a time when I will rest unmoved by any state. These monthly checkups with our cultivation Doctor are bitter/sweet. I keep working, keep to the time just a little longer each visit, but the melting of of my yang clarity happens every time.

I really do want to purge my sticky spot. I detest these chains that keep me apart from life. Now there is new life underneath the old crust and I want to break through and throw it off. Worst is being chained by the old habit energy between men and women. The defiled response has got to go. I believe I can return to purity and be free of the old dirt--it must be so.

Turning fear to faith, turning juice to crystal, daring to open the heart, chipping and melting old limits and crusts, building new soft, clean strength. Intention true, heart true, away from narrow self to ocean- wide universal scope and practice. All changes come from the practice of the Dharma.

Back to Basics

I just caught one of my very worst old habits. It's called "reaching for an apple on a rickety ladder" or "trying to fly before you learn to walk" or "overlooking the near, straining to see the distant."

I am just learning how to bow for real. My palms should be together, no holes between them and then my mind can be single, unified, no holes. My bowing should be bowing down, lowering my self to the ground as low as I can get, paying homage to the Triple Jewel, the *FLOWER ADORNMENT SUTRA*, and the Flower Adornment Assembly, paying back my dept to all that lives. This is real bowing-- There is no room for sky-writing in my head if this work is to be real.

Recitation comes from the heart. The Sutra is wonderful, the assembly is where I want to be, so I praise them from the heart.

There can be no forcing, no struggle in this work. That's not real.

What is the bad habit? Broad and superficial, not concentrated and deep. I've taken on a whole landscape of practices before I've even truly practiced my basics in bowing. As a result, I am as phoney, as much an actor as ever, only now in robes. I've even taken on externalist "skin-bag"

practices that actually hurt my work on the real ones. Crazy and ignorant, greedy, hateful, stupid and not in the middle.

What kind of Buddhist disciple does not stand erect? does not look at people directly? is not happy at heart? A false kind of disciple does these things. All the glamour and flashy words are as thick as paint.

The real core is within real work. Do one thing well, Then do another. Don't look ahead. Don't look back.

How to Handle Tests

Apply what you learn in your work to every state all the time. Don't leave your method for an instant. Real work.

HENG CH'AU: November 5-7, 1977:

Don't look back, only look ahead

Gold Wheel Temple,

Shih Fu rubs our heads and sends us back to do "our stupid thing." As we left, the Master gave us this instruction, "Pure mind. Continue, continue. Be mindful and singleminded. Don't have that second thought...I don't have a thought in my head all day. I don't think about this and then ponder that."

"We have lots of fake thoughts, Shih fu."

"Until you realize the fruit you will occasionally have defiled thoughts. Everyone does. You've got to come up with a way to subdue them. Use whatever works for you."

Heng Sure and I related some of the difficulties in our cultivation that were hard to subdue. We keep repeating the same old mistakes and both of us were getting really down and "bummed out" about it.

Shih fu: "Don't worry about anything at all. Basically there is no problem at all. If you are attached to some kind of difficulty and say, 'Bummer, bummer,' then suddenly it becomes a 'bummer'".

Shih fu never leaves you feeling down or bad. The Master only gives and never seeks.

HENG SURE: November, 1977:

Measure of Truth in States

Next time you work through what feels like an important understanding, or a big step forward in progress, ask yourself whether or not it takes you off center to applaud the state. Ask yourself whether the self hasn't already taken over the state. Ask yourself, "Could I offer this state, this understanding, as is, to the Buddha?" Or would it look pretty small and defiled sitting up there on the altar.

HENG CH'AU: November 8, 1977:

Flow or Freeze

You've got to really 'let go' right down to the bone. Once you truly decide then each day is easier and lighter. It's indecision and weak faith--trying to hold on and let go at the same time--that rips the heart and mind apart. Indecisiveness destroys us. "Don't have that second thought."

During the coldest weeks of the Wisconsin winter the water is left running a little so the plumbing won't freeze. Water that isn't moving breaks the pipes. Stopping and hesitating with second and third thoughts is the same way. How much of my life have I spent in worry, doubt and tension because I didn't flow with the first true thought--the thought that comes from the heart and doesn't even slow down long enough to be put into words? In all directions, in all places to the ends of empty space let go and merge with the Way! Flow, or freeze.

Woman with offering from her garden,

"I really admire and respect what you are doing. I understand! Really!" she says, "and I think it's really fine."

HENG SURE: November 1977:

Rules for Eating

Eat enough of what is offered, then stop.

Don't eat for flavor.

Don't eat for pleasure.

Observe the Five Contemplations and the Three Wishes.

Waste as little as possible.

Self fears loss of life. Self is created to attach to states, to stop the mind from turning freely and to steer it in familiar ways. This is not true to principle. There is nothing to lose and nothing to gain. Fear is not needed. Only practice is real.

HENG CH'AU: November 9, 1977:

The Mountains have been scaled...

The Master gave us some herbs for "fire" and some for "cold." "All cultivators are prone to catching fire energy from time to time." As the Master said this, I was thinking about how my "fire energy" rises right before lunch. For some reason I have not been able to figure out yet, I fear not having enough food. I fear we'll run out of food and I won't get my fill. I was about to say, "Shih fu, we really don't need these herbs..." but just as I started to open my mouth, the Master smiled and turned saying, "...besides, you can eat them when you're hungry and run out of food."

When you catch "fire", a crowd always gathers. Burning with greedy food flames just before lunch in an abandoned field next to a shopping center, I witnessed five or six women come up within fifteen

minutes of each other. Some were seductive and giggling, and one had a hot cheese pizza with "just a little garlic." "Everything's a test to see what you will do..." They were followed by a crazy man mumbling nonsense and staring at us, "If the Marines kill them, then where are you going... a football," he said as he rocked back and forth on his feet.

Fire is like this. Fire comes from greed and spills out into anger. On fire, you're covered with hooks and edges and everything you touch sticks and tears. A lot of trouble is caused this way. The Bodhisattva is no longer burning with the fire of ego. His mind achieves what is called self-mastery." In other words, he is "cool and clean."

"He makes no mistakes.
His mind is vast, big, pure.
He is happy, blissful, apart from all wrong and vexation.
His mind and his will are soft and flexible.
All his organs are clean and cool.

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA

Ten Transferences

Chapter 25

While we were bowing this afternoon a man stopped and just straight said,

"I'm an electronic technician at the Base. I've been working nights for years. Next week they are going to put me on days. I'm not competent at my work, and I'm afraid."

Monk: "What are you afraid of?"

Man: "If I work days they are sure to know. I won't be able to hide my mistakes like on nights. I don't know what to do. Can you suggest anything?"

Monk: "Not really. The thing we try to do is to treat people like our parents. You wouldn't sell your parents a lemon used car; you wouldn't cheat them or cause them to take a loss or slander them in anyway."

Man: "No, that's true."

Monk: "It's the same with your work. You wouldn't want your parents to ride in an airplane or car you tested if you knew it wasn't safe, wasn't up to code and safety standards."

Man: "But the embarrassment..."

Monk: "If you treat others like your family, then you'll be treated that way and there won't be any hurt or big damage. It's when we just think of ourselves that we get big troubles."

Man: "Is it true you're dedicating your work to everyone? I mean, what's your reward? Or is that it?"

Monk: "We're not after rewards. We do it for our family."

Man: "You mean like everybody is your family? Hmmm. Well, thanks and good luck. I've got some thinking to do."

Highway One North of Lompoc is too dangerous. The narrow shoulder is soft sand. Local people and the Highway Patrol advise alternative: cut over on Burton Mesa Rd. through Vandenberg Village and up 520 through the Air Force Base. 520 is rolling sand dunes and scrub oak. Today is slightly overcast relieving some of the heat.

Meditation changes: Sitting is hard, yet it is the only thing that feels real. Reading and writing both feel like skipping stones on the water--irrelevant and superficial. There is a new lightness, but also a bone chilling cold followed by a strong urge to sleep. Reality is a bizarre mix of past, present and future, with no clear divisions or differences. Dreams of being rejected by old friends and family. Strange and heavy.

The importance of a good teacher is essential to cultivation. The Master's instructions pull us through these states and unfamiliar places "Ch'an is sitting in Dhyana meditation, cultivating the Path that has no superiors...Use your spiritual skill of patience. No matter what karmic obstacles arise they won't hold you back when you are set on enlightenment."

HENG SURE: November, 1977:

When Desire-thoughts Arise Do This

Repent.

Pay no attention.

Be patient.

No emotion in turning place.

It all comes from you.

All dharmas are equal.

Keep working.

Maintain.

Don't talk inside.

Recognize it.

Pull back the light.

End it.

One fewer is one purer.

Chop it off.

Who's doing it?

It's false and empty.

Vows.

HENG CH'AU: November 10, 1977:

"TO SEE A WORLD IN A GRAIN OF SAND..."

We are camped on a back road outside the prison. Strange vibes here. Will try to find a different site tomorrow.

The car was loaded with offerings when we returned to it at the end of the day. A man and woman drove out from Lompoc with fruit, nuts, and juice. They were really happy. "This may be the last time we get to come out," they added, regretfully.

Straighten the mind, purify your every thought. Get out every little wrinkle and return to the "forgotten city." The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas is the "forgotten city" our self-nature and original limitless pure mind. As I write this I have a strong *dejavu*. It includes the whole bowing trip to minute detail. Too fast and thick to write down or look at, it rushes through. How can this be? How can we remember things we are just now doing? Did we do them before? Or did we just see the previews? Or is NOW a dream, and a long memory? I don't know. There's so much that no one can explain or know, so much.

A hot-under-the collar roadside preacher poured out the "word" to us as we bowed along 520. He was crying, yelling, threatening, pleading, and wailing to the sky and the hells. On his feet, kneeling, jumping, and running along side while we kept bowing. There wasn't anything to say. He stayed for an hour and drove off hoarse and sweating. There is nothing to debate or dispute.

"...in this way he tends towards true real principles and he gains entry into the profound place that is without wrangling."

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA
Ten Transferences
Chapter 25

A single mind clears up 10,000 problems. A single thought causes 10,000 problems.

HENG SURE: November, 1977:

Catching the Kid Onstage

After we rejoined Highway One above Gaviota, something changed. Between that time and reaching Lompoc I recognized my inner ego-child, the actor, the mark of self that had run my life for so many years. He is a cheater. He is a performer, a child who wears masks to "protect" his heart. He lives for

strokes, for glamor, for recognition. He loves fame and praise. His mouth is his tool, he is very fast and sharp.

At bottom he hates acting. He is very frightened of life and wants affection--mother-love and father-strength most of all. He acts in order to "earn" it.

On the hill up to Rancho San Julian, Heng Ch'au gave me feedback on the photographer who shot four rolls of me bowing. He pinned down my search for glamour in Buddhist robes and by basic lack of real resolve to leave the world.

These are some of the notes that came out of the next three weeks.

Heng Ch'au and I always went to the top of whatever social scene we were in. Once we won the prize we pooped out on the work. The game was over, it was time to find a bigger game. This attitude carried me through 28 unsatisfied years. I always quit in the face of real work. I always knew that I was a quitter, a cheater, that I did not live in my real heart. Actor.

Now as a Bhikshu, the stage is as big as life. The biggest prize lies ahead of the cultivator but it is not of the world. The Dharma is world-transcending and there is no room for individual fame or glory. There are no "stars" among cultivators. Real kung fu is not visible.

No charm will win this prize. NO words will help. Only direct experiences and total giving up will take me across. If it's not really from the heart, it's still phoney!

Stress principle, banish self. Only pure faith and hard work will succeed. Self-defeating. Penetrate self, transform stingy greed and give birth to a new being transformed from the Dharma.

This is the sticky spot!