

Three Steps One Bow

*Daily Records by
Bhikshus Heng Sure & Hen Ch'au*

HENG SURE, November, 1977:
Find the Golden Thread

This principle makes clear the importance of producing the thought for enlightenment which is just the time when one discovers the golden thread within. Most people eat and sleep through billions of life times before they discover their Buddhature. The Venerable Abbot has vowed that the sound of his voice or one look at his face will awaken the Buddha seeds within. Bad karma covers it over and shrinks it down. Good deeds make it grow. It survives birth and death: "good roots" are just the thread. Some are born with it thick and deep and easy to find, and others actually decrease it during a life time through creating bad deeds and exhausting blessings.

The *AVATAMSAKA sutra* explains the many ways one first recognizes the connection to the Buddhature.

HENG CH'AU: November 17, 1977:

"...Just like the many kinds of fruits which grow in great variety from the orchard's trees;
So too, in the variety of Buddhalands
Do the many kinds of living beings dwell.

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA
Chapter #8, part 3

We are camped in a little clearing that serves both as a dump and a picnic spot on Vandenberg A.F.B. Just after dark, a man and his young son drove up in a camper. They were out looking for "mountains to climb" said Carlos, the little boy.

"That's funny," said Joe, the father, looking directly at me, "You are there and I am here and yet we both are here, now, right next to each other." (Different words yet "all of these together move around."

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA).

"How is that funny?" I ask.

"I mean, I'm a G.I. and live just over there, and you are a monk and you are living just right over here. Right now! Really amazing!"

We talked about being a monk and being a G.I., about the military and the monastery, and Joe was interested in our vows of no sex.

"Somebody's got to do it, right? I mean what would the world be like without sex?" he asked.

I told him about my father taking two weeks off from being a father and working man, to do a retreat at a monastery in an island on Lake Michigan. "When he returned he was different, and he said something I'll never forget." I related.

"What did he say?" asked Joe.

"He said, 'We are just passing through this world. We shouldn't get so attached to things. We are only passing through.'"

"You know," said Joe after a silence. "Somewhere inside I know that is true and right. Sometime, I will need to face that. Who knows? Maybe some crazy hunter will come over that hill in a minute and shoot me full of holes?" Carlos shines the flashlight at the hill no doubt looking for "crazy hunters."

Heng-sure brought over some fresh orange juice, and Joe threw away his beer. He and Carlos shared the juice. "I'd like to offer you something, but I only have beer," he said apologetically.

"So, you look into that stuff, birth and death, I mean. That's your work, huh?"

"That and helping others."

"That's ok." and then as an aside, "Kids are a hassle" as he hands Carlos the juice with a smile. He and Carlos are good friends, but Joe knows sooner or later each of them will have to face "that stuff" for himself. He is impressed by, Heng-sure's vow of silence. Later, while we are meditating, he and Carlos, come back with a box full of groceries, some candles, and a colored post card showing all the wild animals of the desert from Carlos. "Sorry to interrupt your meditation."

"No problem. You drove a long way on a cold, dark night, to make this offering."

"Equally no problem," answers Joe smiling. "We wanted to offer something."

Faith

Someone gave us these alfalfa seeds. They are tiny, dry and don't look like food. But put a few in a jar, cover them with water, and they all crack open sending out sprouts.

Amazing!

When a lot of people first hear the Sutras, it's just like water hitting dry, withered seeds--- 'crack, pop' and out comes a sprout. They feel that for as long as they could remember, these questions and principles were in their minds. They were subtle and hard to grab, but, they were true and equally hard to ignore. Often these ideas and feelings become a secret world within, not shared--almost as if to protect them and keep them pure and special.

Outside, we lived our lives and crossed the street when the light turned green. But inside, this mind kept looking and quietly watching. We dodged the false and sought the true, and waited and hoped for the water.

Picking and choosing, we could hear and see things as they really are. Inside, the heart would say. "No. Close, but that's not it." or "Phoney, false, be careful." And then one hears the Sutras, "Yes, that's it!" Home at last!

Faith is like a fine, luminous thread weaving through space and time without beginning or end. It connects the hearts of all living beings with the true source and returns to the root. It cuts through countries and the boundaries of years and life itself. It calls and leads all living beings back to their original self-nature. Now in India, then Ohio; Canton; Oakland; England; Los Angeles, and Singapore expanding without limit "to the ends of empty space" it doesn't change, as it weaves and gathers us in.

I never really understood faith before. I found a note, Heng-sure, had written on the *AVATAMSAKA SUTRA*, calling faith, "People's words," and "little voices." So, that's it! Faith is just another word for what we call, "true heart", or "intuition", or "something inside says..." Faith is what I have been going on for years without knowing it. Some, "little voice" without words like a faint pulse says, "Keep going, you'll find it." Faith is gyroscope that can't be touched--it's a piece of the thread. When your piece meets the thread, they merge like water drops into a stream. Faith isn't blind, we are. If things seem dark, it's because I've neglected my eyes.

"...It's just like the sun Which appears in the world,
But does not hide or fail to appear,
Because there are blind people who fail to see it.

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA
Ten Transferences Chapter #25

HENG SURE: November, 1977:
Why Hang Around the Saha

Miserable time trying to concentrate. Hornet sting on hand, huge resistance to correct breathing and returning the light--tight muscles and flowing out to everything. Thoughts flying like flocking crows.

Finally at 4:30, the sword begins to cut with this resolve established: "This disciple of the Buddha is not waiting around for pleasure through the senses any longer. Having a body is suffering, and the world is truly a blazing house on fire. I am not holding on for any more mother-love, or sweet milk or strokes to please and support my ego-child. I am returning now back to my real original home in the magic circle of the zero and, and I'm not following these false senses to my death any more." I began to pull back on all the light that had been flowing into cars and rocks, thought, and the weather and after the breathing was grounded, my eyes and concentration reversed and came together inside, and the rest of the afternoon, although an uphill fight, was peaceful and good work.

HENG CH'AU: November 18, 1977:

"...He, himself recalled all the good roots planted in the Buddhas' places in the past..."

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA

Where are the Buddhas' places? In India? In heaven? In outer space?

"Is the Buddha down there on the side-walk--is that why you are down there?" asked a child watching us bow. The Buddha's place is just our own mind cleansed of all greed, hatred, and stupidity. Each pure thought and selfless act of patience, giving, morality, vigor, concentration and wisdom plants a Buddha root.

The Buddha's place is within us in our own nature, not outside. It can't be attained or lost. We either cover it over, or we awaken to it, but it doesn't come or go. The Buddha's place is full of light. We gravitate toward it with kindness, compassion, joy, and giving. This is where our roots stretch and grow healthy. This is the Buddha's place, the unlimited mind.

All along our way we meet people who are looking for the "Buddha's place"--looking for a real and true place to plant and nourish their good roots. People are looking hard for a way to "put it down," and not feel afraid or ashamed to let go and do it like it really is. The Triple Jewel is water for these good roots and soon it's going to rain and there will be pots cracking open to enlightenment, all over the place.

Where is the Buddha's place? Where is the Buddha. The Buddha's place is just your own body. Awakening to your own true self-nature is the Buddha.

"...Bodies like those in the mundane world; the bodies of Buddha are also the same, To understand and know their self-natures, This is called the Buddha..."

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA

Praise in the Tushita Heaven

Chapter #24

The Middle Way

Fasting and bowing doesn't work. The body needs fuel to bow, especially in cold weather. Overeating and bowing doesn't work either. If you are too full of food, you can't bend over. Not too much and not too little is keeping to the Middle Way. There is a time for everything.

"...When living, sit don't lie. When dead, lie down, don't sit. How can a set of stinking bones Be used to cultivate?"

SIXTH PATRIARCH'S SUTRA

Fasting this last month left me weak and stumbling all over the road in a daze of fatigue. Bound and determined to subdue my greedy food habits, overnight or sooner, I bulldozed my way into a dead end. When it was time to bow all I had to cultivate with was a "set of stinking bones."

Then I got so hungry that I inhaled the food the next day, bringing on diarrhea. Now, today I was so afraid I wouldn't get my fill that I bit hard into a broken piece of glass in some rice and broke my tooth leaving a nerve exposed. Really dumb!

Food is in the mind. It is my mind that needs to be subdued, not the diet. Fear of not getting my fill has something to do with fear of letting go--of having no attachment, nothing to control and hold onto as "mine."

Too much or too little, force or License, all sabotage cultivation. As usual I am learning the Middle Way, the hard way.

Bottomless Pit

The mind of greed is just like a bottomless pit.

Add some more, but it's hard to fill, and anger soon appears.

The five desired in confusion turn thoughts upside down-

Ignorant and unaware, the Dharma Vessel topples.

Venerable Master Hua

"Cultivation is easy, is it?" asked the Master last month in L.A. with a big grin. "Each day try eating a little less than full. Keep to the natural, the Middle," he suggested. How reasonable! I works, too.

So, now we both try to eat a little less than our fill and find bowing and ch'an meditation much improved. I don't false think about overeating or starving, and the light can focus now on the real issue: it's my mind that can't be filled, not by belly.

We get a month's supply of Dharma in a time capsule from the Abbot. We use it slowly. By the end of the month, the last bit is understood and fits neatly into place like a final piece of a jigsaw puzzle. We are ready for more. Any way you look at it, this is really hard to conceive of.

"...He is everywhere a good and wise advisor for living beings.
He speaks the proper Dharma and causes them to cultivate."

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA

Chapter #25