

Bodhi Stand presents--

compiled by members of VBS Staff

UPASAKA LEE KUO LIEN

"December 15, 1981, was the most memorable day of my life. It was the day I met my teacher, the Venerable Abbot Hua." So relates Upasaka Lee Kuo Lien from Tregganu, Malaysia.

"For most of my life, I have been an atheism. The doctrines of existential materialism attracted me when I was a young man and influenced me to see religions as the 'crutches of less fortunate individuals.' Although I believed that most religions want to teach people to go toward the good, nonetheless, terms like 'heaven', 'hell', 'cause, effect, and retribution' drew blanks in my mind. It wasn't until the Venerable Abbot and other delegates from the Sino-American Buddhist Association came to speak the Dharma that the impact of Orthodox Buddhism finally dawned on me."

Lee's first meeting of the Abbot coincided with the visit of the Second Sino-American Buddhist Association, Dharma Realm Buddhist University Delegation to Asia. Through his nephew Yang Kuo Sin, a devoted disciple, Lee Kuo Lien came to "check out" the Buddhadharm for himself.

"On December 17 I took refuge with the Venerable Abbot. As the several hundred new disciples knelt together before the Buddhas and recited the verse of repentance, I secretly rejoiced that this life was not wasted after all, for at last I had found a Good and Wise Teacher. I was deeply moved by the Abbot's vow that he himself will not realize Buddhahood until all his disciples have realized Proper Enlightenment. In my heart of hearts I knew all along that with genuine understanding comes the eventual wish to renounce the world and set forth upon the transcendental path. But I still had my doubts and in my mind I rationalized this way, 'I'm still in my prime and I don't need to renounce everything this early--I still have a few years to go around.'

"That night in Singapore the Abbot was lecturing to a capacity crowd of over fifteen hundred. Towards the end of the lecture he suddenly looked over to the direction where I was sitting and very distinctly spoke these lines of verse:

Do not wait until you are old to study the Way.
Many of those lonely graves are filled with young people.

It was as if he had x-ray eyes and had looked right through me! I was astonished and frightened. That night I was unable to sleep. Tossing and turning in bed, I still tried to be my own defense attorney. 'Well, if I really go forth into the left-home life, won't that be evading reality?'

"The next evening, in Johor Bahru, one of the Dharma Masters was speaking. She started out saying, 'Most people have the mistaken notion that leaving the home-life is a means to evade reality. They couldn't be farther from the truth. The very idea behind leaving home is to face reality. It takes guts to make renunciations. It means facing your True Self and not hiding any more behind false facades.'

"By now I was more and more convinced that my teacher was trying to convey a certain message to me through many subtle expedient means.

"On December 23rd in Penang, together with two thousand devotees I witnessed the miraculous healing of a mute and deaf young woman. She had been mute since childhood, but by the aid of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas the girl regained her power of speech. It was inconceivable. I was deeply moved by the true compassion of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

"The next morning I got up at 3:30, intending to participate in the morning chanting. The Abbot came out of his room and I made obeisance to him. The following conversation ensued: 'What did you think of the healing of the mute girl last night?' asked the Abbot.

"'Oh, it was inconceivable!'

"'The things you used to do in the past-- don't do them again,' said the Abbot in a gentle voice.

"'Was I surprised! How could he have known the awful things I've done in the past? I'll tell you: up to this point in my life, if I had been arrested and interrogated--even to the point of being grilled and tortured--I would have gone through blood-shed and even been willing to die on the spot for the ideals which I have pursued rather than to cry. But now, at the slightest pro- from my teacher, I completely broke down. I found myself kneeling before him, weeping like a child. I asked for his forgiveness for the crazy things I used to do. 'Will the Abbot give this disciple a second chance to renew himself?'

"'Not only will I give you a second chance, I will give everyone a second chance,' was the Abbot's kind reply. Then he continued to question me, 'Have you cheated others?'

"'Yes,' I said, 'but that's because they cheated me.'

"'It's okay to let others cheat you, but you absolutely cannot cheat others. Your teacher has no other talent than this: all through my life I've allowed people to cheat me, without bearing any grudges. At any time I'd rather take a loss than to take advantage of others.'

"I began to develop a more profound appreciation for the power of the Dharma after that conversation. The miracles and wonderful events that transpired during the delegation's visit to Asia are too many to recount, but I will briefly relate some states that I personally experienced during that time.

"1) I offered my services as a door guard. As hundreds of people sought interviews from the Abbot, in order to avoid mob scenes, all the devotees had to be screened. I was posted by the door that opened to the stairs leading up to the delegation's sleeping quarters. During those weeks, although I ate one meal a day at noon like the other delegates, I never experienced hunger or thirst, but instead felt very vibrant and energetic. Not only that, in the little corner at the bottom of the stairs where I sat--in an area about three feet square--a flood of heavenly music filled my ears at all times without cease.

"2) After some healings took place, scores of laypeople tried to barge in to see the Abbot. Many of them had to be turned away and since I was the 'door guard', some of them would take their feelings of disappointment out on me by maligning and berating me. No matter how they insulted me with verbal abuse, I never allowed myself to get angry.

"One day an elderly laywoman came by and asked me, 'When people scold you, do you get angry?'"

"'No,' I replied.

"'You mean you don't even feel resentful?'"

"'No, although at times I do feel a little put out,' I said honestly.

"She smiled and comforted me. 'People who scold you are helping you erase your karmic obscacles.' With those words she turned around and left. I related this event to my nephew, who suggested perhaps she was Kuan Yin Bodhisattva come to speak Dharma for me.



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"3) Among the disciples was a laywoman named Yu E, whose sister had been hexed by a sorcerer (a common event in these parts of Southeast Asia). She had brought her sister to the temple hoping to seek an audience with the Abbot. Since the Abbot had an extremely tight schedule and couldn't see her, they were both disappointed. I told the woman, 'If you could bow very sincerely in the Buddhahall, you wouldn't even have to seek a personal interview with the Abbot because he has already promised that anyone who sincerely asks the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will obtain a response.' The woman listened to my advice and started to bow in the Buddhahall. I joined them as well. In about ten minutes, a strange thing happened. The sister started to get up from her wheel chair, saying that she also wanted to join in the bowing. In a while the Abbot came down the stairs to preside over the refuge ceremony. I took the sick woman to the center of the hall. By now she was very clear-headed. After the ceremony she insisted on going before the Abbot to bow and show her respect. This was someone who half an hour before had been dazed and suffering from black magic! I personally witnessed the entire healing process going on so quietly and imperceptibly and my faith in the Buddhadharma grew.

"Above I have described just a few of the many amazing events which I witnessed during the delegation's visit. But the most wonderful 'healing' is the healing of the mind--my own mind."

In February of 1982, Lee Kuo Lien came on his own to the City of 10,000 Buddhas where he currently resides. He participates fully in all the activities of the Assembly--the ceremonies, the University classes--and helps with the various construction projects that are currently in progress. Every evening he attends the FLOWER ADORNMENT (AVATAMSAKA) Assembly, during which he hears the unfolding of the most profound mysteries of the King of Kings of Sutras, which opens his heart to new spaces he has never ventured into before. He concludes, "As I said, I'm a middle-aged man who has just stumbled into a new life. I'm living life anew--born again in the Buddha-dharma."