

Three Steps One Bow

Daily Records by Bhikshus Heng Sure & Heng Ch'au

HENG CH'AU: November 29, 1977:

Each Receives According to Its Kind

A rancher stopped, very friendly.

"Yes, I had a friend who became a Buddhist monk...often think about him. You're vegetarians! Oh well, you aren't helping promote my business. I'm a cattleman. My son, he'll be happy. He's a vegetable farmer--no meat for him."

As he drives away, he says, "Don't worry about accidentally starting a fire. The drought hit us so bad, there's nothing left to burn."

As he left, I thought of how everything in our lives speaks the Dharma. Like this rancher: A son doesn't eat meat; a friend who's a Buddhist monk; a drought that's ruining his cattle business, and yet, they don't connect and make sense to him. They speak, but aren't heard clearly.

I thought of how everyday people and things tell me how it really is--who I am and what it's all about. All around nature and my daily experiences speak of cause and effect, the impermanence of everything, and the importance of going toward the good; how much do I hear?

I was feeling bummed out and full of faults--dejected and low in spirit. The *AVATAMSAKA SUTRA* turned it right around and recharged me. What a friend! It said, the Bodhisattva "never grows weary. He is unattached and obtains a mind of faith which does not retreat." I stopped feeling sorry for myself, and was reminded of why we're out here.

"...If one can leave arrogance and laxness behind, then one can aid all that lives; if one can aid all that lives, then one can reside in birth and death without tiring of it."

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA

Worthy Leader

Chapter 12 part 1

Pick up the pieces and hit the road! We are back on Highway One, and heading for Guadalupe, CA.

HENG SURE: November, 1977

Refueling at Gold Wheel

We practice for a month fueled by the Master's instructions. His advice feels prophetic, timecapsuled," unfolding as the situations arise outside, timed to our readiness to understand inside.

After a month, we return to his presence for more instructions, more fuel and then back out to work.

Each time the last week rolls up, either Heng-ch'au, or I am on the brink of exhaustion. It comes from pushing the ego to the edge and from having not enough skill to balance on the Middle Way, without toppling over on the side of force. This is a better situation than falling off the side of laxness, but only because the Master is there to catch us at the end of the month. Otherwise, we would regularly push ourselves right off the road into accidents, injuries, and distaste for cultivation.

This is a major area of learning that we have only recently glimpsed: much less cultivated. It's called "solid, sincere, and constant": solid faith, sincere vows, and constant practice.

Believe your teacher, and know what you want, and put your heart into it; keep up the pressure, everyday. No sudden changes; no spectacular gains; no heroic victories; just steady everyday work, and step by step, walking forward without retreat.

Here's another way of saying it. A major fault Heng-ch'au and I share is trying to force the Way. We grit out teeth, tighten our bodies, and plunge ahead, as if we could break through our coverings and views and desire in one blow. The Middle Way of the Buddha is like water, and water doesn't work that way. Water absorbs all things, and does not change. It bears all force used against it and returns to stillness. It produces all life.

When we push past the center in our struggles to "break through," we are at that time in the grip of the Self, the Ego. Fast, hard "cultivation" is not real cultivation. It does not come from the heart. It is just another form of laziness. The motivation for force is to get a job done and over with, and then go back to sleep. This is the "vacation syndrome" that traps many cultivators.

Real cultivation is a constant daily pressure that bit by bit makes solid, actual changes in old habits and views.

HENG CH'AU: November 30, 1977:

Rely on the Method

The *AVATAMSAKA SUTRA* talks about and describes what is experienced and known apart from the intellect. It is the language and wisdom of the true mind in all living beings. No wonder it feels like home!

Getting a little better at "waiting out" the fire pressure that comes with concentration, and no sex. If you can bear it, it turns into light, and burns up afflictions. If you can't, it turns into fight (anger) and greed. Still full of food false thoughts. Really hard to put that one down.

HENG CH'AU: December 1, 1977:

George, the tortilla maker from Santa Barbara stopped. "Business is bad. I have a medal for good luck my parents gave, here," he said, pulling a chain out from under his shirt. "I don't let anyone else touch it. I always carry it with me. But business is still bad. So my wife said, 'Why don't you ask those two monks, maybe they can help us.'" We talked a little. George made an offering and then left to try to drum up some business. I told him "luck" came from what we did and thought. If we did good things, we'd have good luck, if we did bad things, we'd have bad luck. It's hard to run a business and always do good, but in the long run, it's harder not to.

HENG SURE: December 2, 1977:

Note to Heng Ch'au

After a long month of forcing the Way came three days of down-at-heart struggle--emotional turning and hard labor.

Strange, near the end of lunch I had finally emerged from a dark cave or found a safe island in my drifting boat or discovered that the war is over. My body and mind relaxed. Part of me said, "Welcome back to the world. It's nice that you're still intact and able to cultivate."

Part of me said, "Too bad, if you could have held on to your edge you might have taken a big step forward. As it is you haven't lost anything but you stopped just before a turning point. You delayed the resolution of a spiritual crisis same as you always do. You didn't make it off the high-dive tower."

Is this second voice reliable or is it attachment to states?

It did feel as if a long pendulum swing of several weeks or more stopped just short of the extreme. I saw the end of a long tunnel that I had been crawling towards. At lunch, I stood up and said, "Come on. That's enough for now," and walked out. Strange.

In the place of turning, if you keep no emotion, then you will always and forever dwell in Naga Concentration.

-The Sixth Patriarch

Simply let your mind be like empty space without clinging to the view of emptiness and the responding function will be unobstructed. In motion and in stillness do not have thought. Forget feelings of holy or common, put an end to both subject and object. The nature and the mark will then be "thus, thus," and at no time will you not be in a state of concentration.

-The Sixth Patriarch

HENG CH'AU: December 2, 1977:

We bow to return all beings to their original, enlightened self-nature. We bow to get rid of false thoughts and attachments. We bow to end disasters and suffering for all living beings.

A cowboy slows his pick-up truck along-side and three tough cattle dogs bound out the back and surround us, barking and yelping. They don't know quite what to make of us. Neither does the cowboy. We keep bowing and they keep circling and barking. Finally the cowboy slaps the side of the truck with his hand and the dogs turn and leap back into the truck. He gets in and they slowly drive away as we slowly keep bowing.

The Buddhadharma is new to the West. Really it's not new or strange at all. We all just got a little lost and forgot what the real thing looks like. We are all a little rusty at taming the frontier inside. But it will come back to us.

A false thought is looking forward to something--anticipating and living for the future. Today I found myself uncontrollably looking out for the Gold Mountain van. It was a lack of concentration but I didn't try hard enough to turn it. I kept watching and expecting.

That night I had a dream where I was playing with a little child. I set the child on my lap and it turned into a nasty demon that started to squeeze the very life out of me. I couldn't get out of its vice-like grip. Finally, I grabbed it with both hands and put its ear next to my mouth and recited a line from the Shurangama Mantra five times. It was like turning off the power switch for an electro-magnet. The demon immediately went limp and dropped to the floor.

HENG CH'AU: December 3, 1977:

Some quotes from the Master:

Mantras are the names of the Dharma protectors, the Bodhisattva-spirit protectors. You should recite as if they were coming closer and protecting you. The more you recite, the closer they come.

In reciting Sutras, you take across the soul. A ghost is just a person transformed. A Buddha is just a person who cultivated. Bodhisattvas are what people can become.

HENG SURE: December 1977:

Round Number--

The warning signals of being at rope's end; at the juncture of ego break-up:

1. fuzzy mind, no concentration.
2. constant food thoughts.
3. looking and listening for offerings.
4. thoughts of lay people, home, family, past histories, careers, etc.
5. sexual fantasies.

When the ego fears a loss of control, when I feel close to death, these images fill my head. This is the top of the 100 foot pole. Time to take another step, shake down the energy and relax. Continue working--all states are false.

Check your posture: head up!

HENG CH'AU: December 4, 1977:

Renounce What

Why do we shave our heads? So we won't spend so much time looking at our false face. Hair is a big ego identity blanket. What you want to do, is look into your original face--the face without a self. To do that, you've got to get rid of the covers. Hair is one of them.

Shaving the head symbolizes renunciation of the world, i.e. the self, as an independent entity. Without hair to hide behind and fuss over, it is easier to find the heart.

The Master on doubt:

"Small doubt brings small enlightenment. Big doubt produces big enlightenment. No doubt at all, no enlightenment."

During a pause in the Dharma talks at Gold Wheel, a layperson comes up and says to Dharma Master Heng-Shun, who is sitting next to me:

"Do you want some new shoes?"

"No, these are fine."

"How about a scarf and knitted hood?"

"No, really, I have all I need."

"Boy, you don't want anything, do you?" and with a smile returns to her seat. I turned to Heng-Shun, and said,

"That's it! --Don't have any desire--don't want anything." Heng-Shun, without a thought,

"Not to even want 'not wanting anything' is even better."