

RECORDS OF THE LIFE OF VENERABLE MASTER HSUAN HUA

Buddhist Text Translation Society



PART I. EARLY YEARS

The Venerable Master Hsuan Hua, who is also called An Tz'u and Tu Lun, was born in Manchuria, Sung Chiang province, Shuang Ch'eng County, near the city of Harbin on the Sungari River. The Master's father was a farmer named Pai Fu Hai. His mother, maiden name Hu, was a devoted Buddhist who ate only pure vegetarian food and recited the Buddha's name all throughout her life. She gave birth to eight children, five sons and three daughters, of whom the Master is the youngest.

One night, in a dream, she saw Amitabha Buddha emitting brilliant light which shone throughout the world and shook heaven and earth. Startled, she awoke to find the room filled with a rare fragrance and at that moment, the Master was born. He cried continuously for three days out of deep sympathy for beings who suffer in the Saha world.



SEEING DEATH

The Master was raised in a remote country village. One day when he was eleven years old he saw an infant wrapped in straw lying in the brush. Its eyes and mouth were shut and when he called to it, it did not respond. The Master had never seen death and questioned his companions who answered, "It's dead!"

Still, he did not understand the meaning of death. When he returned home, he asked his mother who said, "Everyone must die. Some die of old age, some of disease, and some in accidents. Farmers, workers, merchants, and officials--the rich as well as the poor--all must eventually die."

"But there must be a way to escape death!" said the Master.

"There is," replied a visitor in their household, "you must cultivate the Way; that is the only method. Understand your own mind and become enlightened to your basic nature. In this way you may end birth and death and stop the revolving wheel of rebirth."

Although he was very young, the Master understood this profound principle. The visitor's words affected him deeply. Afterwards he resolved to leave the home-life to be a Bhikshu. When he asked his mother for permission to do so, she said, "Your wish to leave the home-life is truly rare and good, and if you have good roots, a firm will, and a great Bodhi heart, you may realize the Supreme Buddha Way. I approve of your wish, which verifies my former dream, but I am old and will not live long. You should stay and serve your father and me. When we die you may leave the home-life to cultivate."

The Master respected his mother's wishes and followed her to worship the Buddha. He took excellent care of his parents, fanning them in the summer and warming their cold beds in the winter. He served them as if they were living Buddhas and became widely known as "Filial Son Pai."

-to be continued.

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