

Bodhi Mirror presents--

BHIKSHU HENG SHUN

Compiled by Bhikshuni Heng Ch'ih

When Bhikshu Heng Shun attended public schools on Chicago's West Side, he couldn't get interested. But from the moment he opened the LOTUS SUTRA, he vowed to study diligently. His difficulty with public schools was actually a temporary one. He relates : "The second year of high school I missed more days than I attended and as a consequence failed every subject. The next year I went to a Military and naval academy in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, which turned my problems with school around. During and after my year at the military academy I always got A's and B's in my courses."

Pursuing philosophy on his own led him to discover the teachings of the Buddha while still in high school. And as he put it, "When I first read the Buddha's teaching, I felt that at last I had found the most perfect, complete, and ultimate explanation of life. I knew then that I wanted to devote my life to the study and practice of Buddhism, but I didn't know that it was possible for a Westerner to become a Bhikshu."

At Northern Illinois University he took courses in philosophy and Asian studies, but was disillusioned by the totally "academic" approach. Knowing full well that the intention of the Buddha's teaching was to practice it and discover its meaning through actual experience, he immediately perceived that the University had totally missed this point and had turned the Dharma into an intellectual "head trip," making it rather useless. But at the same time, Bhikshu Heng Shun was studying translations by the Buddhist Publication Society of Sri Lanka. After escorting his aging grandmother to Greece for her first visit to her homeland in fifty years, he went to work in the central supply department of a hospital in the United States, dispensing medical supplies and surgical equipment, with the exception of drugs. Meanwhile he wrote to BPS in Sri Lanka asking them where a Westerner could go to study and practice the Dharma. They recommended Thailand. Six months later Bhikshu Heng Shun was in Thailand. His stay was brief, however--a mere three months--during which he lived in three temples. He opted to return to the United States when his visa expired but once back in America he was convinced he should take advantage of the opportunity to become a Bhikshu. It didn't occur to him to look into Buddhist groups in the United States--it was then 1973--he just assumed they were all lay movements, so he went back to Thailand and became a Shramenera at Wat Bovornives in Bangkok. He relates:

"Soon afterwards, I read a Mahayana Sutra --an English translation of the LOTUS SUTRA.



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Up until that time I had read only Theravada Sutras and studied the Abhidharma texts. After reading the LOTUS (DHARMA FLOWER) SUTRA, I realized that the scope of the Buddha and the Dharma was far greater than I had ever imagined."

THE CART IS HIGH AND WIDE, ADORNED WITH A MULTITUDE OF INTERTWINING JEWELS, SURROUNDED BY RAILINGS, AND HUNG WITH BELLS ON ITS FOUR SIDES..IT IS YOKED TO AN OX, PLUMP AND WHITE AND OF FINE APPEARANCE, OF GREAT MUSCULAR STRENGTH, WHO WALKS WITH EVEN TREAD, AS FLEET AS THE WIND.

Ultimately, how high and how wide is the cart? No one can tell exactly because the cart is an analogy for the Great Vehicle Dharma.

Someone asked me, "How big is the Great Vehicle? How small is the Small Vehicle? How big does it have to be before it qualifies as 'Great'? How small does it have to be before it is considered 'small'? Where do you draw the line?"

I answered, "The Great Vehicle is so high you cannot see its top and so broad you cannot see its borders. 'High and wide' represent the knowledge and vision of the Buddha. 'Knowledge' refers to the All-Wisdom of the Thus Come One. 'Vision' refers to the Buddha Eye. With his vision, there is nothing the Buddha doesn't see. With his knowledge, there is nothing the Buddha fails to know."

-excerpt from DHARMA FLOWER SUTRA CH. 3
Master Hua's commentary.

"I had made plans to go to a Mahayana country and pursue my study and practice of the Great Vehicle there," says Bhikshu Heng Shun, "but a Bhikshu from Australia who lived in the same monastery as I did, gave me a copy of the RECORDS OF THE LIFE OF THE VENERABLE MASTER HSUAN HUA, VOLUME I. After reading it, I knew that the Master was my teacher. So I returned to the United States and found Gold Mountain Monastery in San Francisco." He was ordained as a Bhikshu in 1976 at the First Precept Platform held at the City of 10,000 Buddhas.

"After living at Gold Mountain for so many years, and hearing the Dharma taught by the Venerable Master, most especially his lectures on the FLOWER ADORNMENT SUTRA, my perception of the Buddha's teaching has changed quite dramatically. It is indeed more profound than most people--even Buddhists--ever realize. Yet without practice, most importantly holding the Five Precepts of not killing, not stealing, not indulging in sexual misconduct, not lying, and not taking intoxicants (drugs, alcohol, and tobacco), one can never know what these profound principles really mean in terms of actual experience."

The yoke that holds the white ox to the cart represents no outflows. Attaining to no outflows is not an easy matter. In order to succeed in this, you must defend yourself against the thieves in your own house. You must guard yourself from your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind-- the six thieves. These six can turn you upside down and cause you endless affliction. These six steal the Dharma treasures from your self-nature. If you let them run wild in your own house, then you end up with outflows. If you can reach the state of no outflows, however, you will certainly realize Buddhahood.

-excerpt from DHARMA FLOWER SUTRA, CH. 3.
Master Hua's commentary.

Taking the FLOWER ADORNMENT SUTRA as his Dharma-door, Dharma Master Heng Shun bows to the characters of the text one by one, for a period of one to two hours each day. He also bows the FLOWER ADORNMENT REPENTANCE every day, and recites the prose of the FLOWER ADORNMENT SUTRA'S CHAPTER ON UNIVERSAL WORTHY BODHISATTVA'S CONDUCT AND VOWS, as well as the UNIVERSAL DOOR CHAPTER OF THE DHARMA FLOWER SUTRA from memory.

At Gold Mountain Monastery, Dharma Master Heng Shun has a busy schedule and a variety of administrative duties which include distributing Buddhist Text Translation Society and Vajra Bodhi Sea Publications, handling the accounting of the Monastery, acting as full-time Wei No (leader of ceremonies), and answering the general correspondence.

Dharma Master Heng Shun is also active in the Buddhist Text Translation Society, having translated the text and commentary of the FLOWER ADORNMENT SUTRA, CHAPTER 17, "MERIT AND VIRTUE FROM FIRST BRINGING FORTH THE MIND," which is now in print and available from BTTS. He is currently working on the first draft of the Association's Introduction to Buddhism, based primarily on the FLOWER ADORNMENT SUTRA. He continually translates the text of the FLOWER ADORNMENT SUTRA as he bows to it, having completed a rough translation of the first seventeen chapters to date.

FORTHCOMING FROM BTTS

BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS RECITATION MANUAL. This volume contains the text only of the Ten Major and Forty-eight Minor Bodhisattva Precepts, printed in large type for ease in recitation. AVAILABLE EARLY JULY, 1982.