

## *Three Steps One Bow*

HENG CH'AU: December 11, 1977: Guadalupe: We bowed past a cemetery accompanied by six or seven laypeople who drove four hours from Los Angeles and got no sleep to join in the pilgrimage.

We ate lunch under a lone palm tree on the main drag. The janitor of the building came out laden with towels, water, and an offer of full use of the manufacturing firm while we were there.

Lots of cars and people gathered and stared. Tense vibrations, lots of cars full of drinking gangs of young men. Suddenly a family walked up and said, "Our boys told us what you are doing. We want to help out." They broke the ice. After that, the crowd dispersed and lots of offerings and good wishes came our way.

The police: "You have any problems just give us a call. We'll be glad to help out," they said, looking down the street to where two solid blocks of bars, pool halls, and cheap hotels begin. "It's a pretty rough section ahead--lots of drunks and hecklers--so if you need help, just call. We'll be close by."

"We never expect trouble. We get back what we put out. If we keep cool and don't put out bad vibrations, then that's what we get back."

"Well all the same... (skeptical)...have a pleasant stay in Guadalupe. It's going to be getting dark soon--just about when you reach the bars. Call if you need help or anything." (worried).

"Thanks, we'll be fine."

We bowed into the heart of the bars and night clubs. Groups of men and young toughs gathered around to comment and jeer. They were all wound up and waiting for something to pop. Then suddenly a "mom figure" strident waitress swung open the door of her cafe and yelled, "God bless, good luck to you, boys." The tension broke.

One by one the men turned and went home. We transferred the merit outside a boarded-up x-rated movie theatre while the police quietly watched in their squad car parked on a side street. "All made from the mind alone."

HENG SURE: December, 1977: I spent all those years as a student cheating myself, thinking I was smart to be lazy. Life was "getting away with it" and preparing to pass tests any way possible. No one taught me to behave that way, I learned it by myself. Playing was important and hiding my true heart was something I did early on. How selfish, and in the end, how poor! What did I learn? The ways of people: how to manipulate them, how to cheat and how to hide.

Now I have found what I want to do. I want to join the assembly of pure Bodhisattvas. To succeed requires the opposite of everything I know to do. There is no cheating, no charm, no hiding the heart. I have to start over and unlearn and then learn the way human beings are really supposed to behave and then study and practice the way Bodhisattvas live. It's a long road, coming from the muddy rut I began in. That's where it is.

What I want is to help people end their pain and I want to work to accomplish my Teacher's vows.

HENG CH'AU: December 12, 1977:

Small worlds, just these are large worlds;  
large worlds are nothing but small worlds.

*-Avatamsaka Sutra*

*"Chapter of the Merit and Virtue of first Bringing Forth the Resolve."*

Guadalupe is a small world. Bowing down its main street at sunrise we watch it grow and come alive. Guadalupe is different from Los Angeles--the same kinds of thoughts made both the large and the small. Store owners unlock their doors and cash registers. A white side-burned well-dressed man carrying a newspaper under his arm opens the small brick bank on the corner. Flags go up and window awnings come down. People fill their bodies with caffeine and sugar and their cars with gas and hurry to work. How different--big and small, worlds are equal.

It's the same all over the world: "small worlds are just large worlds and large worlds are nothing but small worlds." Coming and going, day after day, change without difference. And yet behind it all, behind all the large and small worlds, is something real and true that transcends the mundane. It's so hard to find or even remember in the mad shuffle that all of this "business" of running around isn't real, isn't truly who we are. There are other worlds to discover and always more beyond them without exhaustion.

We crossed into San Luis Obispo County, crossing over the Santa Maria River bridge, which is 190 bows wide. The river is a road of sand because of the drought. Artichokes, celery, and broccoli are being harvested.

False thoughts slowly fade and settle like the valley winds and traffic at the close of the day. No particular thoughts. Happy to be quiet. Wanting nothing. Going nowhere and coming from the same.

The more we bow, the more simple our lives get. Each day chips away at the fancy embroidery and phoniness. I have been thinking lately of the men I've known who are straight, simple, and unpretentious. My father, my grandfather, and my teacher are such men. They embody an unadorned and honest heart. They don't waste words, or "put on a style."

"...When the Bodhisattva, Mahasattva contemplates his good roots in this way, his mind of faith is purified."

*THE AVATASAKA SUTRA Ten Transferences Chapter 25*

State: "Emptiness." Suddenly there was nothing to do. All my things I do every day turned flat and hollow. Bowing, sitting, eating, reading, writing, tai-chi, etc. were as flat as a dead balloon. A rush of fear and impatience welled up. "Now what!? What's going to happen if there is nothing to do? How come everything just went empty?"

Everything inside and outside for as far and as deep as I could see was empty, without meaning. Everywhere I checked there was nothing to hook onto to chase away this big void that was staring me straight in the heart. My panic itself was empty--I couldn't even find security in fear!

I sat in ch'an meditation. After a while I had a vision of my body leaving the earth like a three-stage rocket. As I shot out deeper into empty space, I could see my body, an empty shell, floating below. Soon there was just empty space and an awareness.

I made some hot tea, took a walk under the stars, and returned to sit. Time passed quickly. I was chilled but not afraid or panicky. Just nothing at all and all okay.

HENG SURE: December, 1977:

### Making Practice a Full-time Job

No vacations allowed day or night. These are moments of unconscious old habits when thoughts or impulses rise and dwell unchecked?

- 1) The urge to talk becomes a written comment.
- 2) The urge to eat a bit more; I nibble when full.
- 3) Tendency to hold the breath when moving from pose to pose.
- 4) Tendency to close off from people--to put on a mask or hide.
- 5) The urge to go into a pose or sketch when public speaking.
- 6) Tendency to smile and shine at acceptable people.

Cures:

1. Cultivate silence. If must write, make it very brief. Consider the reader. Be sensitive, and expedient. Use proper Dharma.
2. Stop! No treats! Don't stuff. No desire.
3. Relax. Return light. Use method. Drop energy down.
4. Use method. Expand and drop energy down. Find your heart. Be patient. All beings are level and equal. Help out.
5. Find the "actor-kid." Still him. Talk from heart.
6. The jewel is within. Use method. Return light; open eyes; close mouth. Drop the energy down. Allow silence; be patient!

No strokes! No more returning to ignorance with the five desires. Straighten up and get soft!

*-continued next issue*

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