

Bodhi Mirror presents—

BHIKSHU ISARAYAN (D.M. TSE MING)

Bhikshu Isarayan left the home-life ten years ago in Thailand, under the Theravadan tradition. The first two years of his training was steeped in meditation, under the guidance of certain meditation masters. Then, on the Pravara Day (the end of the summer retreat) of his second year in residence at a Thai Wat, Dharma Master Tse Ming made a vow before the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. He resolved to tread the path of ascetic practices, not stopping until he arrived at the Enlightenment of the Buddha. He vowed that he would understand his mind and see his nature. From thence on he delved into a program of vigorous bitter practices, determined to sample the "bitter within the bitter," exerting his body and mind to the limit, smelting them to become more pure and durable day by day. Keeping nothing other than three robes, his begging bowl and a sun shade, true to the Buddha's recommendations for those who pursue *dhutangha* practices, he lived the life of a wandering mendicant, begging for his food once a day in mornings roaming from mountain forests to town-ships, covering a wide range of villages, cities, and wilderness areas in his travels. Of the 72 precincts in the entire country of Thailand, Dharma Master Tse Ming's tracks have covered 50.

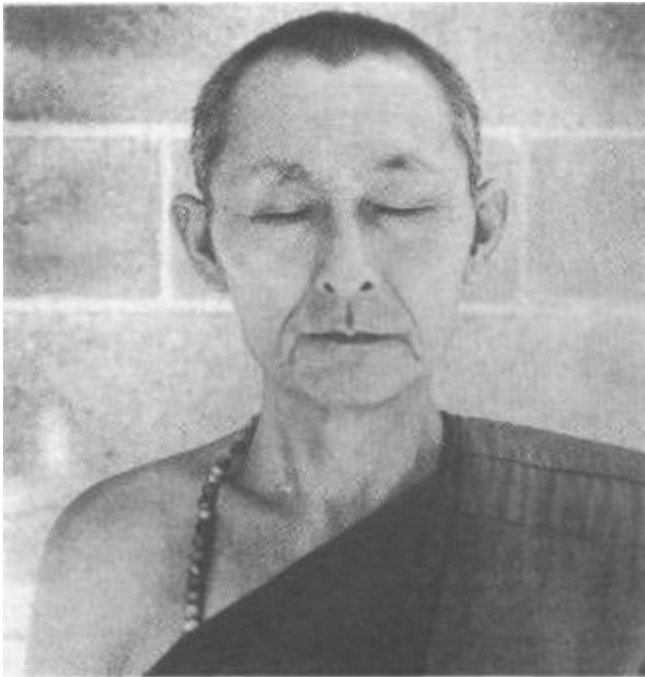
Time flew; in a wink, he passed six years in Thailand. There are a lot of mountain caves in the rain forest and mountainous regions, which are inhabited by seasoned cultivators. Dharma Master Tse Ming went and dwelt in many such caves. Most of them were dark and dank, though varied in size. It took a little getting used to, but soon the life style became second nature to him. Many were the days of idyllic tranquility and peace spent in the depths of those mountains.

He would move from forest to forest, taking heed not to become attached to any fixed dwelling place. Aside from tending to the most basic needs such as his daily meal taken before noon, he lived a life of virtual seclusion. Dharma Master Tse Ming says, "Whether I was dwelling in a rustic hut or a mountain cave, I would start out at 4:00 a.m. every morning and walk a distance of some six miles into the nearest town with my begging bowl. Upon getting my food for the day, I would immediately head back. I would return to my cave before 9:00 a.m. This dharma I cultivated methodically for years, and I enjoyed excellent health, because of the steady exercise."

Dharma Master Tse Ming further relates, "Ever since I left the home-life, I have adhered to the principle of never seeking for advantages from external conditions. 'According with conditions, and not changing,' that's my motto. I take the Eight Proper Paths and the Four Noble Truths as my guide, I believe that I will hold to my vows to the end of my life, and dedicate this body and mind to do the Buddha's work. I have deep faith that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will always aid me, provided I remain true. They won't leave me hungry or destitute."

In December of 1978, Dharma Master Tse Ming made a visit back to Penang, his home-town. There he was led by a lay believer to a mountain cave that was inhabited by another Dharma master some sixty years ago. The stone cave had been deserted for almost three decades, and everywhere around it abounded tall grass and thick undergrowth. The atmosphere was eerie enough to make the flesh creep; what's more, inside the cave dwelt many poisonous snakes, vipers, scorpions and the like. Dharma Master Ming remembers of that first encounter.

"The natives warned me, 'The ghosts and spirits in this area are really fierce!' But since I was a left-home person, and had no hang-ups in my heart, what did I have to fear? I decided to have a go at it. The first few nights were indeed horrifying. Sitting up in meditation in the late hours of the night, I would smell a repulsive odor resembling horse urine. I wondered whether it was the actings up of weird mountain freaks. However, these states did not intimidate me. I launched into this contemplation: May any merit accrued from my cultivation be transferred to all of you spirits and ghosts, so that you can be quickly crossed over. Since I did not contend with them, eventually the atmosphere cleared up and the strange spirits and I got along capitally. Soon, lay people ventured up on their own, and offered to clean the area. With concerted effort, in no time at all the cave assumed a new appearance. It became a sparkling, fresh Bodhimanda."



DHARMA MASTER TSE MING

A couple of years later found Dharma Master Tse Ming living in a cave on some 1500 foot high mountain ledge, about twenty miles outside of Penang. In October of 1981, while sitting in meditation, a four line gatha spontaneously welled up from his sub-consciousness. He wrote out the gatha, which reads,

Proclaiming his teachings, like Dharma rain that pervades throughout
the world,
He transforms people of Western lands.
The superior Lord Shakya comes to lend aid,
As people and gods gaze up at him in reverence and respect.

I took a look at the gatha. The first character from each of the four lines together made up the phrase "Hsuan Hua Shang Ren," the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua. This unusual circumstance drove me to write to the Ven. Abbot. Soon a reply came from Gold Mountain Monastery, in San Francisco, with an invitation to come to The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas to cultivate.

"A couple of months after that incident, a delegation from SABA, DRBU, under the Venerable Abbot leadership toured South East Asia. I followed the delegation as it toured Kuala Lumpur and Penang. In Penang I witnessed the miraculous cure of a young woman who had lost both her hearing and speaking faculties ever since the age of six years. Before an audience of 2,000, under the aid of the Abbot, the woman started to speak--her first time in 20 years! The event rocked all of Penang. My faith in the inconceivability of the Buddha-dharma grew in leaps and bounds.

"Later, during an audience with the Abbot, I expressed my wish to come to The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas to investigate the teachings of the Great Vehicle, since up till then I had had a very limited exposure to the Mahayana teachings. The Abbot said, 'Life is really bitter at The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, do you think you can take it?' To this question, I only smiled and did not reply. But I think the Venerable Abbot understood my intent.

"Things worked out smoothly after that. In April of 1982, I arrived in the United States. Here at The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, I have started into an intensive study of the *AVATAMSAKA SUTRA* lectures, as well as other Mahayana Sutras. The lifestyle here has opened up vast vistas for me; it's so different from my previous training, and yet a natural outgrowth and expansion into something greater and all-encompassing. I'm now one step further into fulfilling my vows of propagating the Buddhadharma and doing the Buddha's work."