

RECORDS OF THE LIFE OF VENERABLE MASTER HSUAN HUA

Buddhist Text Translation Society

GUIDED ACROSS

On the nineteenth day of the second lunar month, the Anniversary of the birth of Kuan Yin Bodhisattva, when the Master was twelve years old, he dreamed he was wandering in a vast expanse of wilderness. Suddenly he came upon a road which was gutted with holes like those of a sieve. They were deep, dark, and extremely dangerous. The Master knew that if he slipped and fell he would never get out again. He stood bewildered, unable to move forward or back. He had lost sight of his father and mother and could not find his way home. Remembering that he had not yet fulfilled his vow to leave the home-life, he grew frightened and began to cry, calling for the Buddha's protection.

Just then an old woman appeared wearing a patchwork robe and a string of beads. On her feet were straw sandals and in her hand a bamboo pole. Her eyes shone with a spiritual radiance and her face beamed with compassion. "Child," she asked, "Why are you so upset?"

The boy brushed his tears aside and said, "I'm lost on a dangerous road and can't find my way home."

"Don't worry," she said, "just follow me and I'll take you there."

She led him down the road. In an instant they were walking on a safe, smooth highway. He could see clearly into the distance and was free to ramble in the Dharma Realm. Seeing his home ahead, he felt joy for which there is no name. Glancing back on the dangerous road, he saw many people following him--old and young, men and woman, monks and scholars. "Who are those people?" he asked. "Where did they come from and where are they going?"

"They have an affinity with you," she said, "and they also want to go home. You must guide them well and show them the Way so that they may all arrive at Nirvana. I have important work to do elsewhere, and so I shall leave you now, but soon we shall meet again."

The Master asked her name and where she lived. "You will find out when you arrive home," she said. "There's no need to ask so many questions." Suddenly she whirled around and disappeared. The Master led the people safely home and woke from his dream feeling extremely happy.



FILIAL PIETY

Filiality is the foremost of the ten thousand virtues and the foundation of all cultivation.

When the Master was very young, his ambition was to become emperor. He ordered all the village children to pile up a mound of dirt in an empty field and he sat on top of it and issued commands. Twenty, thirty, sometimes even fifty little children would silently obey. He told them to bow to him and they put their heads on the ground. But after the Master saw the dead child, his conduct changed. He no longer wanted people to bow to him, he wished to bow to them instead.

At the age of twelve, he decided to bow to his parents every day. But then he thought, "If I suddenly start bowing they might not like it and order me to stop. Everyone bows to his parents and elders at New Year's but no one bows every day. There's no precedent for it. What shall I do?"

Then he thought of a plan:

The first time he bowed, his father was shocked. "What are you doing?" he demanded.

"I have been unfilial in the past," said the Master, "but now I want to cultivate the Way and put an end to birth and death. In order to cultivate it is absolutely necessary to respect one's parents."

"You don't have to bow," said his father. "It will be enough just to listen to us and do what you are told."

Then the Master fabricated a vision in order to persuade his parents to allow him to practice filial piety. "Father," he said, "last night I had a dream. I don't know whether it was a Buddha or a Bodhisattva, but someone said to me, 'Your offense karma is extremely heavy and you will soon die unless you bow to your parents every day.' Now, father, I don't exactly believe the dream, but on the other hand I certainly don't want to die, and so I am going to bow to you."

Hearing that, his parents made no further objections. Although they didn't like it at first, gradually they were pleased to see their son changing his habits and growing in wisdom and virtue.