

Three Steps One Bow

Bhikshus Heng Sure and Heng Ch'au on their bowing pilgrimage to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas

HENG SURE:

How come I'm so happy? What this trip has brought me: I'm now
blind: no glasses.

mute: no talking.

helpless: The Dharma Protector cooks, drives, protects, decides.

dull: no relating, no emotions, a dead bird,

stupid: thoughts subdued, personal history forgotten,

ashamed: constant review of bad deeds and faults.

hopeless: desires squelched. Future unplanned.

powerless: all conveniences unplugged and abandoned,

sore: new plumbing and wiring, callouses, aches.

--every one a priceless treasure. Earned with hard work. Getting deeper. Wouldn't trade any of it for gold.

HENG CH'AU: December 28, 1978

The clear circle of sky was above this A.M. again, surrounded by dark thunderclouds.

Barry stopped. "You're lucky you're not on the mesa," he said.

"Why?" I asked.

"It's all flooded. Everything is under water!"

The mesa was the only place not hit by a typhoon when we were bowing on it last week. Now the very same mesa is flooded after we are two miles safely past. Heng Sure and I really feel protected, like someone is compassionately watching over us every step of the way, shielding us from all harm and dangers. We would have never made it this far without help.

Rainbows and Birth and Death

The sky fills with a full double rain-bow. The colors are striking against the deep purple storm clouds. My eyes drift and fix on the beautiful rainbow, almost unknowingly. Instantly my mind is flooded with defiled thoughts and images. "What's going on?" I say to myself. "Just now it's running wild in the garbage. Why?"

Then it came to me: looking at the rain-bow was running outside after forms. All desire is one desire; one desire is the same as all desire. Gazing at the rainbow was desire in forms. It set off all the upside-down circuits in my mind as surely as if I had gone to an x-rated movie.

If you can really put down the desire for forms, then everything is finished. No matter who it is--heroes, great people, and cultivators, too, they all fall to beautiful forms. All of the problems of the world, all of the trouble and afflictions begin right here.

If you want to end afflictions once and for all, then end your desire. If you want to follow your afflictions, then just let your desires run free...We are born out of desire for form and we die out of desire for form.

Ven. Master Hua
-enroute instructions
Marshall, CA 5-18-77

An older woman walks one block in a heavy rain downpour without shoes or a raincoat just to offer a big smile and a dollar.

In the early damp foggy morning, another elderly woman stopped her car in the rush-hour traffic. She shuffled across the highway in her slippers to offer a few dollars. "To help you; bless you!" she said full of pep and kindness.

HENG SURE:

What goes on inside that 1956 Plymouth 2-Tone Vihara

- 3:50 Alarm clock--brrrrrrring! From a heap of blankets a hand appears to reach for matches on seat-back altar. Uncover kerosene lantern from near food-box. Light it and trim wick. Stretch, take off blanket poncho. Praise Kuan Shih Yin Bodhisattva, begin Da Bei Jou. Unwrap lower blankets. Say mantra against harming insects. Step out of car, relieve nature, check the sky, do T'ai Chi waist circles. Four Da Bei Jou's.
- 4:00 In full lotus, don seven-piece sash. Light incense, begin morning recitation. Trade off wei-no (conductor of ceremonies) duties each week. Instruments: small red wooden fish, brass bell and a Sierra Club cup struck with a wooden clothes pin.
- 5:00 Bow to teachers and elders and parents. Sutra reading for Heng Ch'au. Currently *SUTRA IN FORTY-TWO SECTIONS*.
- 5:15 Write in journals. Drink tea if thermos water is hot. Drink warm water if not.

- 6:00 Roll out for T'ai Chi Ch'uan basic movements, exercises. Fifteen to twenty da bei jou's under the stars (recently under the rain clouds!) Always cold at first. T'ai Chi starts engines turning, like pulling rip-cord on a chain saw. Rrrmm! Basic warm-ups done. Heng Ch'au practices Shao Lin Ch'uan or T'ai Kwan Do movements, then we begin the T'ai Chi set.
- 6:45 Fold blankets, store gear in stuff sacks, take water jugs off car roof. Start car. Drink juice or tea when we have it. Don grey monk's robes, precept sashes. Heng Sure takes blue Sutra pack, Heng Ch'au prepares yellow carry-all monk's bag. Five to ten Da Bei Jou's.
- 7:00 Drive out to bowing site. Heng Sure begins prayers and bowing. Heng Ch'au drives ahead one-half mile, arranges gear, locks car, walks back, joins bowing. Sun appears.
- 10:30 Single-minded bowing to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. Heng Ch'au checks watch, signals recess. Return to car, sit in full lotus--five to ten Da Bei Jou's. If weather permits, Heng Ch'au sits on tailgate. Otherwise, both sit inside the car. Forty-two Hands and Eyes.
- 11:00 Heng Ch'au starts Svea stove, opens cans, washes vegetables, heats water for thermos. Heng Sure studies Sutras or writes in journal.
- 11:25 Heng Sure offers food to Buddhas, feeds Peng bird, and spirits.
- 11:30 Recite Meal Offering Praise. Lunch: three bites of Ritz crackers to accompany three recollections. Begin five contemplations. Lunch rules: no talking, reading, writing notes. Pass only food. Stop eating when 80% full. Typical menu: crackers, nut-raisin mix, apple and orange, cheese, bread, peanut butter and jelly, granola. Alternative: hot vegetable stew over cooked whole grain brown rice, bulgar wheat, beans, soy sauce, miso, sesame salt, pickles--menu varies according to offerings.
- 12:15 End meal. Heng Sure translates, from Ven. Abbot's writings: poetry, talks, and essays.
- 12:30 Clean up, brush teeth, repack car--ten to fifteen Da Bei Jou's. Return to bowing site.
- 5:00 Single-minded bowing to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. Triple Refuge, Transference of Merit, bows to the Master. Return to the car. Wash hands and face, stow bowing gear. Heng Ch'au finds camp-site along the road. Ten to fifteen Da Bei Jou's.
- 6:00 Ch'an meditation. Forty-two Hands and Eyes.
- 7:00 Evening recitation. Sutra reading/ Translation from *AVATAMSAKA SUTRA*.
- 8:15 Sutra study, journal writing. Ch'an meditation. Finish Da Bei Jou's.

9:30 Shurangama mantras, Triple refuge, bows to the Patriarchs.

10:15 Standing meditaion. Finish Da Bei Jou's. Put on Sweater, vest, jacket, down parka, hat, hood, sweat pants, blanket poncho. Blow out lamp.

11:00 Fall asleep sitting up. Exhausted, free, and happy.



THE THREE MASTERS (shown center) and Ten Certifiers (shown in part) join with new Preceptees following the completion of the Transmission of the Complete Precepts of the Thousand Buddhas held in October 1982 at the City of 10,000 Buddhas.

Like the ocean beats the rugged shore,
Day and night, without a moment's pause.
Big rocks wear smooth, small rocks wear out.
Bowing breaks thought-covers in this way.

Heng Sure

The Fire of Patience, The Water of Time

Inner changes result from hard work. Long bowing--four hours, no break. Long sitting--three hours, full lotus. New energy rubs old blocks, leaves, and debris. New eyes see old habits. Tests and trials.

Shih-fu: "Now that you know false thinking is not okay, you can't do it any more, can you?"

Riding a yin-yang see-saw. Great Compassion mantra--great tranquilizer. Too tense? Recite to relax. Too scattered? Recite to concentrate. Feel old and dirty? Recite and feel new and clean.

Slowly closing gaps in mindfulness. Less time wasted not cultivating every day. Pay a price for this quality work? Ego fights back, smoke screens, afflictions, twisting, turning, schemes to sabotage.

"...The Way grows by a foot, and the demons are already on top."

No vacations; got to watch it all the time. Who watches? Heng Sure. Watches who? Heng Sure. All states of mind working back to the harmony in the Original Middle. What counts? The bowing which breaks through thought-covers like the sea smoothes rocks.

HENG CH'AU: Dec. 29, 1977

We are bowing in heavy traffic. Chen-lee and his family from Los Angeles stopped yesterday on their way back from the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. They brought some clothes and food. They had attended the winter meditation session. Although they themselves weren't aware of it, they were full of light and peace. Everyone looked so good and calm.

Meat and Disasters

Barry stopped to report the road conditions and keep us up on local points of interest. He checks on us everyday. There's always a little Dharma that gets exchanged too. Today, it was on killing and vegetarianism.

"You eat fish?" asks Barry.

"No." I answer.

"How about clams and oysters?" he wonders.

"Nothing with blood and breath. It's the first of our precepts: no killing. I heard a wise old monk say that the cause of cancer was from eating too much meat. The hateful energy an animal feels just before being killed is held in its body and absorbed by the one who eats. As the monk put it, 'The slaughtered cow says, 'All right, you killed me so I'm going to give you cancer.' The old cultivator observed that animals and people fill up with revenge for killing and hatred. They keep looking for ways to vent it. Soon it fills up the world until war breaks out. So, there's a saying:

If you want to know why there are wars,
Listen to the cries at the slaughter house at midnight.

The value of holding the precepts is right here:

...to eradicate disasters and make the world a better place. Not eating meat reduces calamities and disasters."

"Oh, so that's it replied Barry looking down at a package of fish he just brought. "Well, plants scream, too, when you eat them," he said as he left, "maybe not as loud, though..."

HENG SURE:

The Buddhist and the Cynic: A conversation about fun

Cynic: I still don't understand this business about bitter practices. What kind of perverse high do you get from cutting out everything that's fun?

Buddhist: If you had to label the biggest difference in my life since I became a Buddhist it would be something like this: I act on faith in true principles. Okay?

Cynic: Yeah. Okay, so? Answer my question.

Buddhist: Right. What I used to call "fun," I now call "blind suffering, delayed pain." What I used to consider perverse self-denial I now recognize as true happiness. Are you with me?

Cynic: I'm listening.

Buddhist: The principle behind it is this: "To enjoy your blessings is to exhaust blessings; to endure suffering is to end suffering."

Cynic: What's a "blessing?"

Buddhist: It's what we used to call fun. If you go live your life totally in your senses grabbing for pleasure and running from your pain, you waste energy, you hurt people through selfish behavior, and in general, you waste your share of light. Did you ever find any "fun" that lasted?

Cynic: No. That's true. It always goes flat.

Buddhist: And the constant search for more and new fun is exactly what is meant by "exhausting your blessings." At a certain point, I just stopped beating the dead horse called "having a good time." The desires I was scrambling to satisfy have pushed me around long enough. Pushing for fun turns on you and makes you less free than if you just sat still, content to be right where you are. What do you get when the thrill is gone? Heat, hassle, pain, and dust--over and over again. Boy! I've had enough of that for this lifetime!

Cynic: I hear you; I hear you! For a Buddhist, you still can get pretty riled up!

Buddhist: When you see the truth, how can you ever again be satisfied with the false?

Cynic: Well suppose I gave up good times, what do you do with yourself, stare at your navel?
It won't ever be more popular than color T.V., you know.

Buddhist: Remember what I said, "Act on faith in true principles." Action is what Buddhism stresses. Not a milk-toast belief, but do it yourself trial and error practice.

Cynic: You practice having no fun?

Buddhist: You practice saying no to desire, because the principle points you to something a little more solid than fun, and a lot less selfish. When the urge to run outside and buy a little fun rises up, the bitter practice cultivator chooses not to satisfy the urge. He has patience instead. His faith in the truth holds his energy in. He's cool and calm in the beginning, in the middle, and in the end. When the thrill seeker comes dragging home miserable and deflated after another flat round of being pushed by his desires, the cultivator of virtue is just as happy as when he began. Maybe he's a bit more wise than before. He certainly hasn't lost any of his juice and spark.

Cynic: Cultivator of virtue?

Buddhist: Yeah, virtue.

Cynic: Like little Mary Sunshine?

Buddhist: No. Like the Buddha, the smartest, most fearless individual who ever walked the planet. One of his names is "adorned with the perfection of ten thousand virtues."

Cynic: Oh, that's virtue, huh?

Buddhist: You could call it by other names: happiness, freedom, and power. It comes from enduring suffering and not cashing in blessings.

Cynic: Kind of makes thrill-seeking seem pale and shallow by comparison.

Buddhist: That's the point. Once you know that there's more to life than being trapped in the cage of your desires, then this whole new world of real happiness, and pure freedom opens up for you. Sages with virtue have what is called "the power that cuts without harming."

Cynic: Say, what do you call this true principle that you study?

Buddhist: We call it Proper Buddhadharma.

Cynic: Sorry about this edge on my words, but it's hard not to be cynical these days. I've been taught not to trust in anything. It's the sickness of the Scientific age.

Buddhist: Don't I know it! That makes the discovery of true principle even sweeter.

Cynic: Even the bitter ones?

Buddhist: Here's another one to start you out on:
Bitter practices, Sweet mind.

Cynic: By the way, what are bitter practices?

Buddhist: They are just doing the things you don't want to do. That is, the bitterest. Say NO to your ego. If you can do that all the time, everywhere, that's a bitter practice. The Buddha taught twelve beneficial "bitter" practices for cultivators of asceticism on the way to Buddhahood. Does that describe you? A future Buddha?

Cynic: Maybe I am, but just don't know it?

Buddhist: Right. Happy cultivation to you.

Cynic: You sure I won't have a good time?

Buddhist: Try your best!

-continued next issue