

ACROSS THE SEA OF SUFFERING IN A BOAT OF VOWS

-by Bhikshu Heng Jau

Before the Buddha, Bodhisattvas of the ten directions, this assembly and the Venerable Abbot, this disciple would like to make vows.

Now that we have just recently investigated the Fifty Skandha Demons States from the *SHURANGAMA SUTRA*, this disciple has been using them like a mirror to illuminate his past. This disciple has come to see that his past has been like a treacherous minefield of deviant knowledge and deviant views. Only through the power of vows made in the past, and much protection from the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, as well as the Dharma-protecting spirits has it been possible for this disciple to have reached the safety of the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas without having fallen along the way. Since today marks the anniversary of Shakyamuni Buddha's Accomplishment of the Way, I would like to renew vows made in the past to repay the kindness of my original Teacher.

The first vow: This disciple vows that, as in this life, so in all lives to the exhaustion of future time and the Dharma realm, I will leave the home life under the Venerable Abbot and faithfully protect the Venerable Abbot's Dharma. Furthermore, this disciple vows to always leave home in the future as a pure virgin male youth. If he still has to undergo retribution of a sexual nature for his past karma, this disciple prays that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will take pity on him so that such retribution can be undergone in some other manner.

The second vow: This disciple vows, in all future lives to the exhaustion of empty space and the Dharma realm, to help build, establish, maintain and serve in whatever capacity he can all Way-places like the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, where the Proper Dharma can flourish and be propagated from. Not until the Proper Dharma is to be found in every household, in every village, town, country, and world throughout each and every world system, in each and every dust mote of the Dharma realm, and in each and every heart and mind of all living beings in all the realms of existence throughout the Dharma realm to the exhaustion of future time; not until then will this disciple consider this vow to be fulfilled.

The third vow: This disciple vows within one year to be able to recite from memory the text of the Fifty Skandha Demon States from the *SHURANGAMA SUTRA*.

The fourth vow: This disciple vows, in this life and in all future lives to the exhaustion of the Dharma realm, to translate and propagate the *RECORDS OF THE LIVES OF HIGH SANG-HANS*. so that future generations will come to know of the heroic deeds of their ancestors.

The fifth vow: Because he is greedy for food, this disciple vows to always take his one meal a day in one sitting.

The sixth vow: Because this disciple sometimes gives rise to jealousy, he vows to cultivate Universal Worthy Bodhisattva's Fifth Vow of "*compliantly rejoicing in merit and virtue*" by understanding it as "rejoicing in the merit and virtue of others." Whenever and wherever people are cultivating according to the Proper Dharma, this disciple will do his best to be a good and faithful Dharma-protector.

May any merit and virtue from these vows be dedicated so that all living beings may quickly leave suffering and attain bliss.