

THREE STEPS, ONE BOW

*Records of the Bowing Pilgrimage
of Bhikshus Heng Sure & Ch'au*

HENG CH'AU: Dec. 30, 1977

See, all things howsoever they flourish,
Return to the root from which they grew.

TAO TE CHING

Back to nature: Return to the Source, Go back to the Root.

A young family who is really into the "back to nature" movement stopped out with a meal offering. They spend a lot of time backpacking together and we ate mountain-style: nuts, dried fruit, wayfarers' bread, sprouts, cheese, and yerba buena tea they gathered themselves from nearby hills.

The parents, who are local school teachers, saw a story about the pilgrimage and said, "We all wanted to come out, we felt as if we had a lot in common even though we've never met, and none of us know much about Buddhism." After the meal they told us of a plan called "benevolent neglect" that would allow the National Parks to return to their original state simply by not messing with the environment. "The idea is a sound one," said Jack. "Don't try to do what nature does by itself."

We talked about how we people cover over our true self-nature with false thoughts and attachments just like Yellowstone Park got covered over with camper villages, tourist traps, and electric mobile home hook-ups.

"The nature of people is basically good. It is because of false thinking and attachments that the True Suchness is obscured. Simply have no false thoughts and the nature will be pure of itself..."

THE SIXTH PATRIARCH SUTRA
Great Master Hui-Neng

"Boy, that's just the way it is, isn't it?" reflected Jack. "Life after life we keep turning on a wheel, never getting free."

So many people we meet on the road share a sense of having lost something real and simple. They are looking to fill a hole with a natural freedom and innocence to regain a spark and child-like wonder. They know it begins inside, a pure state of mind, not in a superficial way of politics, health foods, and earth shoes. Buddhism is the ultimate and original "back to nature." When you cultivate, you borrow a path and go back home. The self-nature doesn't come or go. We just cover it over much like the parks get covered over temporarily. The nature of all living beings is

the same, originally pure and complete. It cannot be added to or depleted. Following the Middle Way is the same as following the self-nature. It is always in perfect harmony, neither too much nor too little. This is the root from which we grew.

When Great Master Hui Neng experienced enlightenment he said:

"How unexpected! The self-nature is originally pure in itself.
How unexpected! The self-nature is originally neither produced nor destroyed.
How unexpected! The self-nature is originally complete in itself.
How unexpected! The self-nature is originally unmoving.
How unexpected! The self-nature can produce the ten thousand dharmas."

THE SIXTH PATRIARCH SUTRA

HENG SURE:

"The Buddha told the Four Heavenly Kings, 'From kings, to killers,
Earth Store Bodhisattva speaks of a retribution of a short lifespan...'"

SUTRA OF THE PAST VOWS OF EARTH STORE BODHISATTVA

Chapter 4

Beneath my nose as I bowed to the blacktop I found a killer. Lying prone, one eye squinted, the other eye aiming down a long, deadly rifle barrel: a plastic toy soldier. I used to have a boxful. My brother and I would set up battles and execute the slaughter of each other's troops, day after day. Each tiny cavalry man, each gunner, cowboy, pirate, and marine must have died a thousand times over. Who killed them? Not the other toy figures. We killed them. We knocked them over with a finger or a marble. We killed them in our minds. Entire generations of good men perished on the carpet of our bedroom. What seeds did we plant?

Of course we were only children playing games. We did not make the connection between the horror and suffering of war and killing. The toy guns were silent; the blood was only make-believe. It was just like the violence and death we watched on television—when the program was done we went to eat dinner--unharmd and intact. But how about all those bodies left dying and maimed in our minds? Who consoled the families of the dead? Who swept up the mess, who washed away the blood? Don't be silly it's only a T.V. show. What attitudes did we absorb?

My brother and I were lucky. He went to war and came back, without dying and without directly killing anyone. I met the Buddha-dharma and received the precepts against taking life. But how lucky? Men went to war like toy soldiers or T.V. phantoms only to discover that when metal cuts flesh his pain and fear and grief are unspeakably awful! Each death echoes through families bringing sorrow to many people. It makes you sick with pain. It makes you resolve to kill no more and to be careful planting seeds of killing in children.

HENG CH'AU: (Pismo Beach) 12/31/77

What is Meant by Identical Substance?

A woman called Janie stopped with her aging mother. "We are really moved by what you are doing. We read about it in the papers. It's so rare to find someone who really believes in these things anymore in these days. My mother and I want to help out," she said.

Two older women in a car: "We just came from the doctor. Are you doing this for health?" asked one.

A man stopped and offered to share some prayers "with a 2-by-4."

A young man named Roger: "I read about your trip. I feel one with you. Is there anything I can do for you...I really feel a oneness with what you are trying to do."

Barry stopped with his wife and children. They brought out a carved wood book stand for the Sutra volumes. They were all really happy and clear-eyed. The book stand fitted perfectly on top of the car seat.

Arthur, a local gas station owner, walked up to say, "It made me feel real proud that you prayed at my station...it was a real honor."

Natural Foods Store owner: "Can I give you something to help you on your way?" It was positive and good energy like this all day. Some people stopped in the early morning to warn us, "We are worried for you. Pismo Beach is a mean little town." We found it just the opposite, though. Basically everything is the same: it's our false thinking that creates differences.

Within all Buddhadharmas there is no defilement or purity. There is no darkness or light.
There is neither difference nor unity. There is no truth or falseness, no security or danger.

AVATAMSAKA SUTRA
Pure Conduct
Chapter #11

HENG SURE:

If I ever make progress in Ch'an meditation it will be the first thing in my life. I've earned through real physical sacrifice. It doesn't come easy! The fruits are wonderful! I have to sit through what feels like aeons of discomfort before I settle into stillness. Attached here and stuck there, it takes all I've got, every trick and tool, to keep patiently going. Sometimes it feels like a tug-of-war between a dumptruck and a rhino, with me as the rope between. And then, when the ultimate limit is reached--suddenly it is all worth it, every bit. More! More patience!

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