

Records of the Life of Tripitaka Master Hua

continued from issue #179

BIG KNEES

In La Lin, in the village of Pei Yin Ho, lived Kuan Chung Hsi and his nephew Kuan Chan Hai. Kuan Chung Hsi had been a non-Buddhist teacher, and transmitted a dharma called "The Way of Gathering Conditions." He told his disciples that he had hundreds of treasures for sale at only \$1,000.00 each. The treasures existed in name only, and Kuan Chung Hsi said, "The time is not right and so I can't give them to you now. When the time comes, the world will change and you will have your treasures." He had over four thousand disciples.

When he reached fifty years of age, he realized that in spite of his wealth, he had nothing "precious" with which to protect his own life. Knowing that he was close to death and afraid to die without first understanding how to cultivate the Way, he went with his nephew to search for a Good Knowing Advisor, one with the five eyes and the six spiritual penetrations who could teach him the fundamentals of dhyāna meditation. For three years they wandered together, visiting famous Dharma Masters in well-known monasteries and great scholars in the academies. They sought out hermits in lonely mountain caves, but found no one who could teach them dhyāna. Sad and disappointed, they returned.

One day, the Master went down the mountain to buy some oil, incense, and candles. On the way to town, he stopped to rest at Kuan Chung Hsi's house. When the nephew saw the Master, he was astonished. Pulling his uncle aside he asked, "Who is that monk? Last night I dreamed that he came here and sat on the brick bed. I knelt before him and begged him to teach us the Way. In the dream he said, 'You have a pig skin on your body which must come off before you can cultivate,' and he peeled a layer of skin off my body and threw it on the ground. It was a pig skin. 'You aren't a vegetarian,' the Master said, 'and you eat pork. In the future you will have a pig skin on your back.' I was scared stiff and said to him, 'Oh, no! Pigs are filthy and useless!' I had the dream last night and now the monk is actually here. Is it a lucky sign or not?"

His uncle was excited. "Really?" he said, "did you really have that dream? Of course it's a lucky sign. The monk is the Venerable Master Tu Lun, Filial Son Pai. I've wished to bow to him for a long time and now he's come here. It is true, then, that he has the Way and he's brought it to our house."

After talking they went into the room where the Master was sitting, closed the door, and bowed.

"Have you both gone insane?" said the Master. "What do you want from me? I'm just the same as you. I don't understand the Way."

"We know you cultivate filial piety," said the uncle, "and that you have come to show us the Way. Last night my nephew dreamed you peeled a pig skin off his body."

"You're confused," said the Master. "He's not a pig. How could I peel a pig skin off him? I can't teach you to cultivate, but if you want to find a teacher, I can help you look."

"We've looked everywhere," they said, "but we haven't found one. Wherever we go it is always the same. They all have a lot of name and fame, but no genuine virtue."

During the next two years the Master sent them everywhere to meet all kinds of cultivators and good knowing advisors. They continually insisted on taking the Master as their teacher, but the Master was still a young novice and didn't want any disciples. Finally, they knelt before him and refused to get up. "It's useless to talk about whether or not I have the Way," the Master said. "First learn to sit in full lotus and then I will teach you."

They practiced sitting every day. The nephew had no trouble, but the uncle's bones were old and, in north-east China the mountain people have big kneecaps which stick up about fifteen inches in the air when they try to sit cross-legged. But the uncle kept trying. He pushed his knees down over and over, and in seventy days he finally managed to sit in full lotus. When the Master returned, he noticed that the uncle's legs were swollen. They were so sore, in fact, that he couldn't even step over a cart rut. "You shouldn't sit in full lotus," the Master told him. "Are you still practicing?"

"I am," said the uncle.

"You shouldn't continue," said the Master.

"What do you mean?" said the uncle "I'm about to die and if I don't practice now, what will I do then? No matter what, I'm going to practice meditation. If I die, that's another matter, but as long as I'm still alive, I'm going to practice."

"Do what you like," said the Master, and he left. When he returned a hundred days later he noticed that the uncle's legs were no longer swollen. "You're not still sitting, are you?" he asked.

Kuan Chung Hsi smiled. "I can sit in full lotus now," he said, "and no matter how long I sit, it doesn't hurt, and my legs don't swell."

"Now," said the Master, "I'll teach you how to work," and he instructed them saying:

"Why don't living beings attain the Way? It is because of the false mind which disturbs the true nature and binds them to their passions. Defiled by greed, frustration, and discursive thought, they get caught in the flow of birth and death; they sink into the sea of suffering and lose the Way. But although the sea of suffering is boundless, a turn of the head is the other shore. Always be alert and watchful in meditation, like a chicken watching its eggs, or a dragon guarding its pearl. By and by you will get good news."

The uncle was incredibly happy and sat in meditation every day. When his death approached, he gathered his family together and said, "On such and such a day, at such and such a time, I'm going to leave; I'm going to die. The only thing I still desire is to see my teacher once again. But I don't know where he is now, and so I cannot see him." Then on the appointed day, he sat upright in full lotus, and without an illness, died. That evening, many of the villagers had the same dream; they dreamed that they saw the uncle accompanied by two youths in dark robes, being taken to the West.

Later, the nephew insisted on formally taking the Master as his teacher. He followed the Master down the

road until they entered a clearing. Then suddenly he knelt, clutched the Master's sleeve, and begged to become a disciple. The Master brushed him off and left, while the boy pleaded saying he would not get up unless he was allowed to become a disciple. The boy was truly filial and always respected his teacher, and although his family wasn't rich, every New Year's he gave the Master a gift. He was deeply sincere, and because of his dream about the pig skin, he believed the Master to be a living Bodhisattva.