

Three Steps, One Bow

Excerpts from the Journal of Bhikshus Heng Sure and Heng Chau

Bhikshu Heng Chau:

Thursday, December 28, 1978

Dream:

A big U.S. city, heavy with violence and chaos. Like a state of war; only everyone was fighting everyone else--small gangs of youths filled with hate, armed and looting, destroying, run the torn-up streets, harming everyone and everything. Buildings were half gutted by fires and scarred by past battles. People were launching rocks and rockets from their apartments into a main street, and no one could stop them. There was no police or restraining power. Everyman for himself. Selfishness reigned supreme. Everyone tightly held onto themselves and to their possessions. No mutual helping--everything was individual, private, exclusive. As soon as you parked your car, it was set upon by a gang and everything was stolen. If you escaped alive, you were lucky. A computer gave running reports of traveling conditions in the city sectors: "Sector B from 7th Street to the east side is extremely critical and not safe to enter. Sector C from Ellison Avenue to the Heights is dangerous. Travelers are advised not to stop or slow down for any reason. An outbreak of murder is expected. Sector D from ..."

No one would help or even let you use a telephone to call for help. People ran to their cars and locked up within, drove off, ignoring all cries for help.

Football heroes were in the locker room smoking dope, and young people with good roots were living out fantasies from deviant books on utopias and revolution: No light came from the books. They were dull and musty and full of demonic, dead-end ideas. The young people's heroes were flashy rebels out for self-benefit, wearing strange clothes and putting down everything except their own hang-ups. They lived in luxury, but dressed and looked like gypsies and fairybook characters.

The Sangha and Shih-fu were traveling and giving Dharma.

Shih-fu at one place, "I don't want any wine to drink and we don't 'lecture.' We use our wisdom and look into things together--level and equal."

"But the Tibetans like to lecture and drink wine," counters the host.

"We're different," replies Shihfu.

The circle of golden light was small but pure. The Big Darkness was pressing on the borders and growing. The

heart of all the suffering and disintegration was selfishness. Goodness and giving weren't believed in because each year people did less to benefit others, and soon the children would grow up never seeing kindness, compassion, joy, and giving. They only saw greed, hatred and selfishness.

I told a cop about the rock and rocket siege. The cop was an unarmed woman. She said, "We know, it's frightening," and then ran away. It wasn't safe to fall asleep and I spent the night evading attackers and running the streets with everyone else.

I know more than ever that getting rid of all my selfishness and doing only good for everyone is what really matters.

We prepared an extra bag of food offerings to send with a local family on their way to a meditation session at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. The parents remarked as we divided up the food, "It's really good to see that there's still someone who doesn't hoard these days."

The spirit of leaving home is to get free of all selfishness and attachments. The Buddha exhorted his disciples to travel light and to not become burdened down with excess food, clothes, and possessions. Originally, monks were wanderers and mendicants--compared to bees, who go from flower to flower receiving offerings without disturbing the plant; alert as deer living outside and homeless, and clad with nothing but the three robes and bowl, as a bird flies with its own wings. Frugality and fewness of desires bring peace of mind; desires and seeking for advantage bring suffering, worry and fear. As soon as goods start to pile up and accumulate in the car, we feel oppressed, afflicted, and dragged along by our sense organs. The Master once told us, "Our business in life is to know sufficiency."

"He vows that all living beings leave behind the dharmas of the family life; that with few desires they know sufficiency; and that they stash or hoard nothing."

*-Avatamsaka Sutra
"Ten Transferences" Chapter*

The Dharma fuel that bowing fills our bodies and minds with is sometimes like a splash of cold water in the face in the morning. The bowing seems to have its own Good Knowing Advisor that guides our steps and raises our spirits. Today the Advisor said in my heart, "Go for the big, don't go for the small. The Dharma realm is your turf. It includes measureless worlds in all paths of existence to the ends of empty space." "Don't be lazy or self-satisfied," said the wise bowing advisor within. "As soon as you think you've got something, you're ripe for a fall."

Yesterday bowing was as if standing in front of a bright mirror that penetrated through the ego-coverings, dissolving layer upon layer of selfishness and faults. At the same time, its light revealed the road ahead, a broad vision of the momentous work that needs to be done and an inspiration to "Pure mind, continue, continue." Felt a mixture of shame and new courage.

"Block off and gather in the six organs
Pure thoughts: continue, continue!"

- Shurangama Sutra

Afterward, in a vision while bowing, the Abbot appeared. He was kind and smiling.

"Do you understand a little now," he asked.

"Yes Shih-fu, I'll try my best," I answered.

"The self-nature and the Dharma Realm are non-dual," he said, then left.

Our vows are Bodhisattva vows. We are not allowed to not fulfill them. There is no self and nothing that belongs to self. All is one. Crossing over ourselves is just the beginning of crossing over every living being.

When we hear of bad news we want to work that much more sincerely to correct it. When we hear good news we want to work even harder to keep it rolling.

Bhikshu Heng Chau:

Friday, December 29, 1978

"Pistol Test"

After lunch, while cleaning up at the back of the car, I hear an idling engine from across the road. We are alone on this mountain slope and sense someone is watching us. I turn and see a man in a jeep pointing a pistol and taking aim at us. There's no place or time to run for cover. We are trapped by a dense thicket on one side and a cliff on the other. The man is only a few feet away. I can see his finger start to squeeze the trigger.

"No matter what situation arises, use kindness, compassion, joy and giving to deal with it," advised the Abbot our first day out. "Don't move your mind!"

So I wave at the man and give a friendly smile. He hesitates, then slowly drives closer in his jeep, aiming the pistol at my head with one hand, the other hand on the wheel. He stops, cocks the trigger, then let's go a chilling laugh and drives away without shooting us.

Saved by the wise instructions of a good Advisor. Strange but somehow by relying on those instructions, in both spirit and letter, I didn't feel afraid. I just knew it would be O.K. and my mind remained calm

"The actions of all demons cannot disturb them. They rely on a good and wise
Advisor to Stabilize their minds."

-Avatamsaka Sutra

"Ten Transferences" Chapter

Dream: Heng Sure and I are growing sturdy little seedlings in the car on our journey. They are *Avatamsaka*

sprouts. But we haven't learned how to send them on to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas as fast as we wanted. A particular good batch was sprouting in the car and we were sitting and pondering, "Boy, it's too bad we couldn't have sent these on right now; they're strong and really healthy."

Something about "being male-born..." kept coming up as part of a verse along with "universally transferring all good roots."

"The Bodhisattva Mahasattva takes his good roots that arise from repenting and clearing out all heavy karmic obstacles: his good roots from bowing in respect to all Buddhas of the past, present and future ... and all good roots such as these that follow in happiness. He transfers them to adorn all Buddhalands."

-Avatamsaka Sutra

"Ten Transferences" Chapter

Bhikshu Heng Sure

December 30, 1978

National cross-country meet streamed by in the rain last week. We bowed along as hundreds of men barely clad in satin shorts and team jerseys pounded through bullets of rain and biting winds. It was a tough day to run twenty miles for glory.

High school cross-country coach Bud Papola's maxim: "There are lovers and there are runners. If you want to be a champion, then decide which one you are. The lovers fall behind and never amount to much. The runners pass them on the hills and go places and see sights nobody else reaches or sees. How about you?"

In cultivating the Way, Bodhisattvas set their heart on Bodhi and run on until every living being crosses the finish line to enlightenment. Rain, wind, the twisting road of the mind, never turn long distance Bodhi-runners from the high road to Buddhahood.

Bodhisattvas diligently cultivate and are never lazy or lax. Right away they attain ten minds, all of them perfected.

Intently seeking Buddhahood, they never tire or grow weary. They are determined to rescue living beings.

Avatamsaka Sutra

"Fourth Ground"