

# *Three Steps, One Bow*

*Excerpts from the Journal of Bhikshus Heng Sure and Heng Chau  
Written During Their Bowing Pilgrimage to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas*

Bhikshu Heng Chau  
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## "Saved From Harm"

After washing the dishes I pack up the car and drive ahead about one-half mile to park. There's a group of fired-up, angry men waiting for me. They are sitting on their jeeps, pick-up trucks and motorcycles drinking, cursing and stirred up for trouble. We are on the edge of town, alone, and no place to turn for safety. They glare while I lock up the car. The air is tense and about to explode.

"Get the !#@ out'a here creep. Go someplace else!" someone yells. An empty beer bottle smashes to the ground. It shatters the strained silence and also any hope we had of passing by without incident.

I try to ignore them, they charge over. "I mean it, man. Get out 'a here fast or first we're gonna bust up your car and then we're going to shoot you." Guns, cold hard stares, no smiles. They don't seem to be joking.

I slip my precept sash over my head and shoulder, turn slowly, and start walking down the road. My knees are shaking, heart beating like a scared rabbit. I fold my hands, request the Buddhas' and Bodhisattvas' aid, repent of the past evil karma that I created leading to this run-in, and ask that Heng Sure not receive any of my retribution flack. I do two of the 42 Hands and Eyes mudras, one called "Bestowing Fearlessness" for all situations where there is fear or unrest.

This rare Dharma Jewel does away with heavenly demons.  
Karmic obstacles are dispelled as one goes toward Bodhi....

And another called the "Lariat Hand and Eye" for seeking peace and tranquility in all unrestful situations.

The Lariat Hand is a demon-binding cord.  
Strange ghosts and externalists find it hard to disappear,  
For Krakuchanda's Dharma jewel has many transformations.  
Drive out the deviant, support the proper--  
These secret words are magic.

*-verse by Master Hua*

I feel calmer now inside.

Their engines start up with a roar. I hear them coming from behind like a stampede. The threat of imminent violence is breathing down our necks; you can smell it, it's so close. A pick-up skids to a stop inches from running me over. They box me in so I can't continue. The men are hyped and have the "creepy eyes": constricted pupils and dull glaze. The one closest to me is squeezing and pounding a big pipe wrench in his hands, itching to bust my skull open. He's red in the face, bulging veins and white knuckles gripping the wrench. I step up to the truck cab. He braces and cocks his arm to slap me across the face with the wrench.

"What's with you, I told you to move on!" he threatens.

"We're Buddhist monks. We're making a pilgrimage."

"A what?!" he screams.

"We're praying...praying so things will get a little more peaceful in the world," I answer.

"Why the hell don't you get off this road?"

"We've been on it for almost twenty months. We do it every day."

"For what?" he snarls

"For everyone, not for ourselves," I reply.

Long silence. They are watching Heng Sure while I talk. They want an opening, an excuse to jump us, but it's as if they're tied up and strapped down by an invisible rope.

"Excuse me, I've got to get back to work now," I say, squeezing by their truck. They back off momentarily but gather at the next crossroads, primed for a showdown. They line up across the road, egging each other on, spitting hate and getting psyched up to do something terrible. It's going to take a small miracle to get us through this one. I remember the words the Abbot spoke to us just last week, "No matter what happens, do not fight or get angry; use kindness and compassion."

Just then another car pulls up at the intersection. A happy, bouncy young woman gets out and says excitedly, "Are you the ones making the incredible journey!? I've heard about you. It's really a wonderful thing. Keep on and good luck!"

She is sincere, confident, and full of wholesome light. Her cheerful, gentle words cut through the dark, bad energy like the sun disperses the dull morning fog. She gayly skips back to her car right through the center of the dense, sullen, weapon-wielding men. Smiling, carefree and innocent as a child, her good energy hits their hearts, scowling mob like a bowling ball sends the pins flying.

"Isn't it just the neatest thing you ever saw, guys, huh?!" she says to them.

The violence deflates. The men fizzle out and leave one by one, the bomb of hatred and harm defused in their hearts. We bow through the crossroads unmolested into Half Moon Bay. A big storm that's been building all morning bursts open. In minutes, there's just the pounding rain and two monks bowing on a quiet Sunday afternoon empty highway.

I thought again of the Master's advice, "Don't fight; use kindness and compassion." I think those men were as scared as we were. They must have been hurting inside to come that close to harming, maybe killing two strangers. It was as if they were taken over or "possessed" suddenly by some demonic power. They looked relieved when the bright-eyed young woman broke the evil spell and they could go home in peace. She gave the gift of fearlessness and made everyone feel more kind and humane. She embodied the power of kindness and saved us all from harm.

The actions of all demons cannot disturb them.

They rely on a Good and Wise Advisor to stabilize their minds.

Together with all Bodhisattvas they cultivate the perfection of giving.

They cause all beings to give rise to a heart of kindness and not harm each other.

*Avatamsaka Sutra*  
*"Ten Transferences" Chapter*

January 16, 1979

My dreams at night say the harassment we are receiving during the day while bowing somehow neutralizes the karma of killing. If we don't get angry or afraid, don't hate and seek revenge, then the bad energy exhausts itself in us. The big darkness in the world doesn't grow by that little bit. No matter how bad or polluted the poison we meet, we just absorb it and give it away to empty space, so that it has no place to land. In this way, our own minds expand, and the good energy in the world increases.

Wednesday, January 17, 1979

Early morning, grass dripping wet with dew, bowing north through Half Moon Bay. Bright-eyed innocent school children line up at their school-yard fence to watch us pass. Suddenly, unexpectedly, the air changes. A black, evil energy swoops through the children like the north wind of winter. The color on their faces changes from rosy-pink to gray, their carefree voices turn metallic and harsh.

"Mental retarded people!" yells one.

"Weirdos!" cries another.

"What are you doing!?" demands a tot.

"No. What the hell are you doing," corrects a bigger boy.

"Oh," says the little one, "What the hell are you doing?!"

Then come the dirtier, heavier curses and swearing, then a rock. One rock, two rocks, three rocks... thud, whack, they fall around us. The evil energy crescendos suddenly. Children come running from all directions--girls, boys, big and small, heaving rocks with all their might.

For about one-half hour they rain rocks down on us. The sky is full of flying stones, as we bow past three schools in one city block. We can hear them thud next to our ears on the ground and whiz by our heads. Some slap at our sashes and shatter inches from our heads as we are down in a bow, but not one rock hits us the entire time. Hundreds of rocks are thrown at close range, but they all fall short, go over our heads, or land between us.

The school bell rings, and a teacher, who has been totally unaware of the attack, cheerfully beckons the kids, "Come children, time for school." The evil spell breaks. The children drop their stones. The color returns to their faces, the soft, playful sounds of youth return to their voices. They turn and run off to class as if nothing has happened. Some actually look relieved to put down the rocks and break free of whatever had them in its grip. The air changes back to normal and suddenly there are just two monks quietly bowing in the dew-wet morning grass and youngsters skipping off to school, where minutes before there was a battle field of blood-thirsty, violent children, possessed with the hate fever of a lynch mob. How could such a thing happen?

All disasters that arise are caused by the five desires. The hells, hungry ghosts, animals, King Yama's region; animosity, hatred, conflict, slander and insult--all of these evils are caused by greed and attaching to the five desires.

-Avatamaka Sutra  
"Ten Transferences" Chapter

Like most adults, these children find themselves caught up in a vicious cycle of desire and suffering. From an early age they are stimulated with desires that could never be filled. Television, radio, movies, and magazines wind them up with greed, like atoms in a cyclotron, until they are ready to explode with frustrated tension. Their young minds swim with thoughts of "neat" clothes, girlfriends and boyfriends, tests and grades, motorcycles, hair-style, facial complexion, college, jobs, music, money and candy. They are trapped in a social whirlpool of trying to keep up with their friends, or join up with the "in" crowd in fear of being rejected.

The Bodhisattva in this way contemplates the mundane world and reduces his greed for the flavor of the five desires.

-Avatamsaka Sutra  
"Ten Transferences" Chapter

The disasters and conflicts that plague the world at large begin small and early: in the children. But the children themselves are not the cause; they learn it from adults, who in turn pick it up from their own unsettled minds. Thoughts of greed for food, fame, wealth, sex, and sleep drive us to our wit's end, seeking satisfaction that can never be satisfied. Anger flares and then spills out into stupidity, and before we know it, we've done something we wish we hadn't. Countries harm countries, families harm families, and individuals harm themselves. A Bodhisattva, therefore, begins at the root and gets rid of all greedy desire in his own mind.

To the very end he doesn't seek the unsurpassed way for the pleasures of the five desires. He cultivates the conduct of Bodhi. Only to bring peace and happiness to

all living beings does he resolve to cultivate, only to fulfill his great vows, to sever the bonds and ropes of living beings' miseries and set them free.

One school remained to pass in front of. The tension and pent up anger was hair-trigger and ready to snap. But somehow the brunt of the storm was over. A few kids braved approaching us to talk. When they did, the violence subsided. We exchanged a few kind words and became friends. The crowd broke up and relaxed.

The mind of greed is like a bottomless pit:  
Add some more, but it's hard to fill and anger soon appears.  
The five desires in confusion  
Turn our thoughts upside down.  
Ignorant and unaware,  
The Dharma-vessel topples.

*-Master Hua*

### "Let It Shine"

A young girl throws her chewed-up bubble gum in my face and yells, "psychopath!" Young in years, old in worries. Faces of little kids already looking like tired, haggard men and women. The shadows of the world in their eyes at six and seven years old. How sad and tragic!

In the midst of heavy insults from passing cars of youths and rough-neck cowboys in pickup trucks, some children clambered from a yellow school bus and ambled right over to watch me fix lunch on the open tail gate.

"Oh, you're fixin' lunch, huh? Hi!" they said with big, innocent smiles on totally carefree faces.

They were about four years old, on their way home from pre-school half days, still immune and unpolluted by evil turbidities. They cleared up the air and brought a smile to my saddened heart. There's still hope. It's in the purity of youth and the wisdom of the proper Dharma.

Pure sun of wondrous wisdom,  
Whose great compassion forms a perfect wheel,  
Which dries up the sea of afflictions,  
Pray grant us a little attention!

*-Avatamsaka Sutra  
"Entering the Dharma Realm"*

Monday, January 15, 1979

### "Use Everything—Just Like Empty Space"

Rain stops after eleven days. Angry, hostile toughs continue to harrass us with ridicule, curses and trying to run us off the road or "out of town." Egg barrage at end of the day left the car and the monks dripping. Found all-night laundromat to wash egg-stained robes.

Disciples of the Buddha, when the Bodhisattva Mahasattva cultivates these good roots, he never gets fed up with evil beings, nor does he mistakenly have thoughts of rejection. Even if the world were full of thankless beings, the Bodhisattva would never bear a grudge. He would not have even a single thought of revenge.

He wishes only to eradicate their limitless sufferings and troubles. In all worlds his mind is like empty space, without any attachments.

*Avatamaka Sutra*  
*"Ten Transferences" Chapter*

It's tough not to return the anger and misunderstanding, but that's our work. In silently keeping on bowing and not seeking revenge, the circle of harming and hatred stops with us.

The Buddhadharma is a pure wisdom sun that can evaporate the sea of all our hassles. But often we only seek relief when we reach the end of our suffering rope and are about to sink and drown. We hurt so much from running outside in the darkness that just the sight of the sun makes our eyes squint and our souls scream. Yet extreme suffering can turn to ultimate happiness if we can turn around--turn around and seek within. The world needs a cool moon of wisdom now more than ever to dispel the heat of ignorance and to bestow tranquility. Let it shine.

Pure moon of wonderful wisdom,  
Your great kindness forms a filthless wheel,  
Bestowing calmness on us all,  
I wish you would shine on me.

*-Avatamsaka Sutra*  
*"Entering the Dharma Realm"*