

News from the Dharma Realm

Trip to China

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According to the monks we spoke to, there are leopards, bears, wolves, lions, wild dogs and big snakes of all descriptions, including large boas that appear frequently to the cultivators. Although they see snakes every day, people are never bitten. They don't bother the cultivators. The monks say they have never heard of a case of anyone having been bitten by a snake.

One of the young monks there, the guest prefect or the manager, said that one day, right in the center of the courtyard of Pure Karma Monastery, which is a very run-down temple that was heavily damaged during the cultural revolution, and which is very, very slowly coming back—right in the courtyard, of this temple, a large boa snake appeared. The manager said it was close to twenty feet long, and at least a foot in diameter. It was the biggest snake he had ever seen or heard of. The snake came and stared at the monks in residence and then disappeared. After that, the snakes in the area stayed away from the cultivators. Earlier there had been some problems with the snakes, they frightened the cultivators. But after the boa appeared, the snakes seemed to follow the rules and were less bold. At least that's the story he told us.

The snow falls very heavily there for six months out of the year. Often in the winter they can't get down the mountain for a month at a time. The conditions are very bitter. But hardship also has advantages because the pilgrims can't come as often and the tourists don't come at all. So the bitterness has its benefits.

The cultivators there were different from many of the monks we talked to in other places because of the quality of their motive for coming. The young monks there had made a vow that they would support anyone who fits the requirements and who has a wish to live in a *maupeng* to truly cultivate the Way. Their requirements are a sincere attitude and physical ability to live in the mountain and a wish to really use effort with determination. A person must agree to be vigorous in cultivation and to support the *maupeng*. If a person fits these requirements, then they will support him with offerings of food and necessities as long as the person wants to live in the mountain.

They have now constructed several hermitages and they have other cultivators there who, they say, once they enter the mountain, once they pass through this gate of Pure Karma Vinaya Monastery, they simply don't come back. They go into the mountain and merge with their cultivation and the monks never see them again. So from this we gathered that there is, in fact, a *true daufeng*, "a wind of the Way," the "energy of cultivation," in Jung Nan Shan, that is different.

According to the manager, although the situation is very arduous at Jung Nan Shan, the demands of cultivation are harder on Kunlun Shan, it's even harder at the Kunlun Mountains. There are cultivators who find Jung Nan Shan not sufficiently challenging and they go to a higher and harder and more remote mountain, the Kunlun Mountains, where he says it's very hard, very tough and some people go there when they want to accomplish their work in the Way.

We climbed up to Jing Yeh Lu Sz first, then went further up to the platform where the Ven. Dau Sywan in fact received the offerings of the gods. The story of Ven. Dau Sywan becomes real right there before you. We found a small rock platform on the face of a sheer cliff, and it's there that the Ven. Dau Sywan sat in meditation, and the gods came every day to make offerings to him because of his purity in precepts.

So, how can you prove it? In a cave where the monks are actually living, there is the stone tablet that was carved in the Sung Dynasty. The tablet attests to the story of Vinaya Master Dau Sywan. The stone was pulled down and hidden away, to save it from the cultural revolution. That was ten years ago and they never put it back up.

It looks like a mere slab of rock; in fact it's a priceless relic from the Sung Dynasty that describes his receiving offerings from the gods. The story also talks about a very long python snake that came to Master Dau Sywan and protected him. So, when the monks read about it on the *bei*, the stone tablet, seeing the snake made more sense to them.

We also heard of a nun who lived on a mountain peak called the Peak That Rubs the Heavens (摩天顶). We stood before the god's offering platform then turned around to the south and saw a tall, tall mountain. The story teller said that the nun, a Bhikshuni, left the home-life at age sixteen and at age seventeen had already become the head of the Buddhist Studies Academy. She was a good student in Buddhist studies and a hard worker, but her unique quality was her toughness. She went off to Omei Mountain at that age and never returned. She is now over eighty and she lives alone on Mwo Tyan Ding. Conditions on this particular peak are the hardest on all of Jung Nan Shan. Many young people have gone up to receive instruction from her because she lectures on the Sutras. She explains the Vajra Sutra.

But most of the young people who go there can't take it—it's too severe. She eats only *mantous* (steamed bread) from the flour that she can carry up, or that others bring her. Vegetables won't grow at that height, so she eats very plain, very simple food. Another unique quality about her is that all of her teeth fell out due to her advanced age, yet because of her *gungfu*, her skill, she now has a full set of shiny white teeth. They all grew back. No one can explain that except that she is different from the rest. She has true skill in the Way.

During the cultural revolution, she was struggled against, and she spent a period in jail. But she never gave up her precepts, and when she was ordered to return to lay life, she refused. She said, "Chairman Mao, you can kill me but I am not going to turn my back on

my vows." They couldn't do anything with her so they let her go back. She is still on the Peak at age eighty, cultivating the Way.

We also saw the place where Ven. Shastra Master Kwei Ji, who was also called the "Cow's Head Patriarch," once washed his intestines clean in a stream. We're out of time, so we'll save that story for another time. But we saw the place where that happened.

Just another point of interest, right above Jing Ye Lu Sz, is the grave of the poet Bai Juyi, who was both a vegetarian and a devout Buddhist. He vowed to be buried on Jung Nan Shan when his life was over. So his tomb is there.

One of the more important conversations that we had with the manager there was about his pessimistic prognosis. He said that if there is no new generation of young people who bring forth a real Bodhi resolve to cultivate the Way, then the Buddhadharma will perish in China. He had traveled all over China in the last two years and he saw these problems. The best of the young people have left the country, the best of the old teachers have left, they've gone abroad to different places, and the elders, the ones who have cultivation and who know the Dharma, will soon be gone. What is left are many whose attitude is not serious.

He described them as goof-offs, people who are not cultivating, they are not really left-home people. And of the average cultivators their cultural level, is very low. Another problem is if you live in a public monastery, there are no good knowing advisors to teach you, or people who may be able to take this kind of treatment simply can't stand the rigors of cultivation, so they leave.

He said, this being the case, he is hoping to establish Pure Karma Vinaya Monastery as a center of genuine cultivation. If it can be established, his intent is to then turn it over to a true, "Bright-eyed, Good and Wise Advisor" who can make it the center of the proper Dharma in China. So, whether this vow succeeds or not will be decided in the future. But this is the vow power of the fourteen young cultivators who are there. There are more stories to tell but time doesn't permit, so I'll save those for another time.