

Three Steps One Bow

Daily Records by Bhikshus Heng Sure & Heng Ch'au

HENG SURE, November, 1977:

Short Flashes

Does your mind move when a person approaches? It comes from you, not from them. What do you want that you keep leaking out? Mother-love!

Resolve to "bring out the heart." Uncover your true heart. Let it beat as one with the Patriarchs' heart. The heart repays the debt, the head feeds the self.

Watch the gates, pull your light back from all six sense gates. Back to the center, fuse it, send it up.

Watch lunch carefully. Dangerous time. Take time and watch before you eat a lot of food. Eating is not important. Preserving samadhi is important. This is protecting transcendental Dharma.

All dharmas are the same. All people, men and women, are the same. We're all confused until we work to enlightenment. The Sixth Patriarch earned enlightened wisdom through his own effort.

Make one good, complete bow without having any false thoughts at all. Stand and do it again. Use the method to hold your mind still.

False thinking is yin, cloudy. No thought and cutting off thoughts are yang and light.

Have a strong feeling that what the Venerable Abbot does is give us a stage to cultivate on what we can manage. When we have almost accomplished its goal he "lifts a curtain" to reveal the next stage far off in the distance and he gives us cheer and energy to start out after it. If when we had just begun we had seen how far it was to the end, we probably would have been discouraged or caused to disbelieve. "Do not cause beings to lose their faith." So we cling to our little victories, our step-by-step states of progress and we release the tenacious grasp on our fragile selves bit by bit, blind to the whole truth, over-concerned with details, tense and self-important but still walking, still working. Our eyes are starting to turn in. The far goal is not far, it is DEEP.

HENG CH'AU, November 12, 1977: Lots of offerings the last few days from ranchers, teachers, children, servicemen and their families from the Air Force Base.

Al is an older "lifer." "I was in two wars," he related from his motor scooter as we talked on the road shoulder. "They are ugly and horrible!" We are working for the same thing, I feel—peace. We just do it in different ways." He looked up watching for a response and then said nervously, "Sometimes we have to fight for peace." It was more a question than a conviction.

Al isn't as sure about getting peace by fighting as he is about the need for peace. Who wants to feel they did something "ugly and horrible"? Yet in every war good people find themselves committing acts of destruction and killing. Why? How?

All countries have "God on our side" when they go to war and they fight "to end all wars" and "bring lasting peace". Where does such upside down reasoning begin? With a single thought of discrimination. First there's "me" and "you" then there's "we" and "they." Separate your heart from oneness with all things and your natural seed of compassion and kindness dries up. When the seed of compassion withers, comes factions, parties, countries, and armies. The undivided family of all beings and things is split into a thousand little pieces. After that, killing and war come quickly and easily. "Ugly and horrible" things come from thoughts of greed, anger, and ignorance. It begins with "I" and we haven't seen yet where it could end. Al has, and he is worried and afraid for human-kind.

He came back later with a food offering and said he and his wife would be happy if we stayed at their place for the night. Al said the base is huge and that tomorrow a.m. he will scout out the best bowing route to follow north of the main gate. Al inspired us both to work harder. I have so many selfish thoughts!

Doubt, we are discovering, is just another state of mind and part of cultivation. This p.m. I got a heavy dose of doubt. Nothing seemed real or solid outside. Inside nothing mattered. Our evening ceremonies, food, the Sutras, Buddhas, me, others--all just went flat and empty. A real winner!

I went outside to meditate and somehow at the bottom of this pit of doubt was an opening and beyond it a warm, relaxing light and state beyond words. A line from the Sixth Patriarch came close to describing it: "There are no dharmas, just expedients to get unattached by."

Doubt is just a trick. It's a test to see if you are sincere in your resolve and willing to put it all down. We are learning that anything can happen and no matter what happens, nothing changes.

*All dharmas are apart from words and languages.
Their nature is empty, still, extinct, and uncreated.
Because he wants to thoroughly, clearly penetrate the doctrine,
The Bodhisattva first produces his resolve.
Avatamsaka
Ten Dwellings Chapter.*

HENG SURE: November, 1977:

NO MORE MASKS

Why are laypeople's visits so hard for me to navigate? It's because they push all the buttons that feed the Self. I go on stage, even in silence, and listen for applause. "Fear of loss" is basic to my nature. It leads to acting, to falseness and to hiding behind masks. The masks need energy to maintain them. The energy falters and out comes the light in a "leak." The masks all have holes and the fear which is the true heart's feeling small and undefended cannot be contained.

The energy is given away through tension because the mind and muscles are tight in defense against being real. Cultivation of the method works on the root--the fearful self--at the same time it spotlights the false masks and makes them uncomfortable to maintain. When the fear is understood then there is no need to act. There is no tension because there is no energy wasted in holding up masks. Thus there is no energy leak, no giving away the light and because the Dharma method is at work, I look and feel constantly real.

When the laypeople come, don't be afraid. Think of ways to take them across. We are all one substance--four elements and five false skandhas and the Buddha Nature within. What is there to fear? Remember your heart's vows to save all beings. Feel out ways to give to them. Breathe naturally and return the light always. Watch the actor-self carefully. Accept no strokes and hear no praise. Give no repartee inside or outside. Let the mantra or the holy name relax the body and the mind. Where else will you look to find joy?

When people bow to you does the spotlight on you still throw a shadow? That's the measure of your remaining ego.

HENG CH'AU: November 13, 1977. One of the laypeople and her family came out to bow. As I came upon all of them bowing with Heng Sure, I was really moved. It made a deep impression. The experience reconfirmed in my heart the value of "constant bowing" as a dharma of true humility and selfless giving. I have much to be ashamed of and much to be grateful for. Bowing works on both.

The car was covered with groceries, sugar cane, money, and offerings again today from the people of Lompoc and from the base.

Around sunset as a cold wind came down from the north two young women in a van pulled alongside:

"Hey you guys want to smoke a joint?"

"No, we don't smoke."

"Are you *sure*?"

"Positive."

"Want a beer?"

"We don't drink."

"Are you *sure*?"

"Positive."

"What else is there in life? We're just trying to help you out."

"We're fine."

"Are you *sure*?"

"Positive."

HENG SURE: November, 1977.

LOSING FEAR OF LOSS

Food offerings fill the car. I felt uptight that there were so many. Why? Because I knew some would go bad before I could cram them in my greedy mouth at lunch. Lunch is a big hustle to juggle the soonest-to-spoil with the best of flavors. Why the trouble? Because food is love. Mother feeds you love through the mouth and you take all you can get--don't waste a drop! For someone who is working to leave the world, that food reinforces all the opposite energies.

None of the food has my name on it. Ultimately I can only eat my fill and then I must stop, no matter how much there is to eat up. I have left home now and I no longer hang out gathering dividends on mother-love. I don't belong to my parents any more nor to food nor to my body, nor to life itself. That is the key to birth and death.

What was my face before Mother gave birth to me? It was a monk's face. Then, as now, I belonged to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha--to the Triple Jewel I return my life in worship and in reverence.

HENG CH'AU, November, 1977:

*Within each and every thought are produced measureless numbers of
Buddhalands...*

Avatamsaka

"Flower Store Adorned Sea of Worlds"

Got a new universal joint on the Plymouth in Lompoc. For the first time since leaving home back in May, I was struck by the fact that I was a monk on the INSIDE now, not just in appearance. This trip to town and standing under the grease rack in a sash put me at a loss for words. Something has changed gears inside. I am falling asleep in one world and waking up in another.

How many different kinds of worlds are there? The gas station is one, the used car lot salesman across the street is another. Heng Sure is back in an abandoned field bowing in one world and the person in the back of the ambulance speeding by is in another. The bookkeeper counting the cash behind the locked door is in one world, and in another part of the world people are asleep and dreaming--dreaming of worlds upon worlds. How many worlds are there? How many thoughts are there? They all come from the mind.

Buddhalands in variety beyond thought,

Worlds without limit,

Splendid adornments, fine and greatly varied--

All of these come from the power of the Great Immortal.

-Avatamsaka Sutra

"Flower Store Adorned Sea of Worlds"

HENG SURE: November, 1977:

REPAYING THE DEBT

Because I have a big debt to all living beings, I have resolved to cultivate the Way. Therefore I practice

-being true all the time

-uncovering my true heart

-bringing forth a total resolve for enlightenment

-subduing my ego-child-actor with personal virtue and compassion and unmoving, constant resolve to take him across.

-pulling back and gathering to the center all the energy that runs out the six gates

-purging all emotion from the turning point

-letting my mind be like empty space

-turning my fear to faith

-cutting through all thoughts

-relinquishing all states

-staying in the middle and not wandering

-emptying the top, rooting the bottom

-asking who I really am.

I will succeed in this work and make all of it an offering to the Buddhas.

You cannot force your ego-child to stop play-acting. He will fight back. You have to use compassion and expedient means to subdue him and take him across. Tell him to be true. The old play is over and no one wants to see it again.

Give him an example of virtue. You be true and real all the time and then he will watch and listen and bow along with you. Have faith, take across fear and doubt with pure faith. Bow and pray.

HENG CH'AU: November 15, 1977: "Me, me, me; I want more, more, more," is the single biggest obstacle to world peace. While this thought drives and pushes inside of me, I can never know peace. World peace comes from peace of mind. World wars come from the war inside. In my heart there are countless thoughts of greed, anger, and jealousy. In my mind a never-ending stream of false thoughts and desires wage all-out battles. How can you find "what you're looking for if you cannot find yourself?"

Dream of a demon-hawk with metal vice-like talons suffocating me. Woke up trembling and sweating. Did a mantra and went back to sleep.

THE BLUES

All of us get the blues. We accept it as part of the game, part of living. The blues are a kind of melancholy, moody "down" state. Sad and dreamy, we feel sorry for ourselves and wallow in the dumps. It's said that nobody knows where the blues come from. That's not true. The blues come from turning your back on your true nature and uniting with the dust. The blues come from taking the easy way and getting lost. Every half-hearted move that wasn't 100% "right on" and true brings in the blues. The blues come from cheating and not following the rules--from not having the guts to be honest with yourself and check out the motives behind your moves. Sneaking by, pulling a quick one--not checking out the thoughts (are they defiled or pure?), brings the blues. The blues go when you put down the false and pick up the true.

Heng Sure and I used to get the blues. Since leaving home we don't anymore. We make lots of mistakes but there's no blues.

HENG SURE: November, 1977.

BACK TO THE SOURCE

Pursued the idea of all desire as various ways to return to mother-love. Wealth, sex, fame, food, sleep, and fear, pride, doubt, jealousy are all aspects of the same need. Ordinary people want to return to their physical source: the womb.

Sages return to their spiritual source: the 0 (zero), the golden thread of the Buddha Nature that pervades everywhere. First find the thread, then make offerings to it so it becomes important to you. Hold precepts so that it purifies and runs straight, do good so that it grows yang, establish faith which is the small inner voice, study so that it connects with worldly knowledge, begin to cultivate so that you collect and return all the light/energy from your senses and actually enter into your own womb--your energy center--and go back home.

Ordinary people seek the fetus position--curled up and yin--completely dependent and ignorant. The cultivator seeks the full lotus of the Buddha--straight and yang--completely independent and light and aware.

HENG CH'AU: November 16, 1977. Outside of Vandenberg AFB main gate a speeding van slides and squeals just missing Heng Sure. Close call. Just this a.m. we read in the *Sixth Patriarch's Stura* how a hired assassin made an attempt on the Patriarch's life. He couldn't kill the Ch'an Master because it wasn't his time to die. The Patriarch said, "I don't owe you my life, I only owe you this gold" referring to a debt from a previous life. The assassin could not cut the Master's flesh.

How and when we die isn't easy to know, but it's not chance. When it's time, it can't be avoided. If it isn't time, it won't happen. Either way, it's useless to worry. How our life goes and our death comes has to do with our karma--what we do is what we get.

Nothing is fixed. Bad karma can be eradicated and good karma increased. It all depends on what we do. In every thought and every deed we determine our lives. Maybe Heng Sure's sincere bowing to erase "bad karma created by body, mouth, and mind, based on greed, anger, and stupidity," turned a near-fatal accident into just a few tire skid marks and a cloud of road-dust? The power of repentance and reform is hard to conceive of.

The Master lately instructed us, "All the time you must concentrate your mind and will when you bow. Then you can turn catastrophies into what is auspicious, turn calamities into good fortune.