

Three Steps One Bow

Daily Records by Bhikshu Heng Sure and Heng Ch'au

HENG CH'AU, November 23, 1977:

A woman stopped with an apple pie this a.m. for Thanksgiving tomorrow.

Heng Sure tried abstaining from water after noon to help with ending the drought and I have been fasting twice a month. Both practices were too extreme. We have to use patience and gentleness on ourselves without slacking off or losing resolve. It's a tight rope to walk. We have been on the wrong track for so long that the right road feels wrong and when we think we are on the right road, that's a cue that we are heading for trouble. What feels good isn't always good for you. If it hurts it's not necessarily bad for you either. Nothing is fixed and you've got to listen real close to your own heart to find the right way...real close.

Got some kind of itchy rash--poison oak probably.

Take away all the things I have collected to lean on and who is left? I am not my father or mother. I am not my friends, I am not my education or job. I am not my house. I am not the monk. I am not even my body. My body is just a "snot heap." I am not my mind. The mind is like the wind. What's left?

I'm not sure who I am but I know that really finding out means getting to the point I can put down, one by one, all the things I am not. Each dissolving and painful breakdown of an attachment is followed by an indescribable calm and joy. When all the things I am not are removed and set behind, what's left? Whatever it is, one who finds it doesn't try to kill it with words. There is just a smile and light in one's eyes and you know it's all worth it. Seeing or hearing one who has attained the Way is such an eye and heart opener that you won't rest until everyone is there.

The Bodhisattva should diligently cultivate, the practices of Great Compassion and vow to save all, so that without exception, all come to fruition. Those beings who see him, hear him, listen to him, receive him, or make offering to him, all these will be earned to get peace and happiness.

Avatamsaka
Chapter 12 Part I

I have a bad habit of being a watchdog for other's faults and bad habits while ignoring my own. It's just another way of being lazy and arrogant. This week I got on Heng Sure's case and started fault-finding to avoid doing my own work. Last night in a dream I was wandering down a long out-of-the-way side street with lots of houses. I was peeking in the front doors and scrutinizing things. Just as I turned from nosing into one house the

Master appeared. "Oh! Shih fu! What are you doing here... I mean, uh." I was stammering and caught. The Master didn't say anything but I knew immediately the question was, "What was I doing there?" I woke up and stopped being a watchdog. This really cleared up a wrong road I had been heading down.

In another dream we were riding with the Master in a car. I felt as though I should be taking notes but then realized that it was just a substitute for practice. The Master gave us advice for the future: "If you don't separate from the true nature, don't lose the Middle Way, then everything will be okay. Whatever comes up, respond naturally; rely on true principles." A lot was going to be happening but there would be no problems if we "do not separate from 'this.'" The Master went on, "The small and the big are alike. They are both empty. Be quiet and still. Watch and accord with conditions. Be without a view of self, others, living beings, or lifespan." The talk was warm and gentle but not emotional. Lots of happy light. "Then everything's okay, right?" asked the Master with a smile.

HENG SURE, November, 1977:

It Only Feels Like Death

I felt dead last Saturday--scared literally to death of the new shifting world I'm growing into. Nothing remains to hang onto, nothing real but the work, the work is not yet solid to sustain the energy. Result: outflows and fear. Not enough kung fu to cut through but a real new emptiness inside and out. Ego screams, "I don't want to die!" Dives backwards into old pictures of sex, fame, food, and fantasies of family and friends.

The Dharma is the shining beacon of faith that keeps the work inching forward on this tightrope between emptiness and existence. I know the Master knows and I know that in the ends and in the middle it's really all okay. But out here in between and back and forth, it feels like a burning house.

Deep faith and a pure resolve to leave it all will win the day. Patience and hard work will cut the doubts and chase the fears.

HENG CH'AU, November 24, 1977:

For the Sangha, everyday is Thanksgiving. Every day is a kind of Christmas and birthday too. The Sangha is one of the gems of the Triple Jewel because their purity in holding precepts takes them out of the dust of the material world. So they shine and are models for all living beings.

One of the precepts is "Do not hold gold, silver, and valuable objects." And yet they don't beg or seek. Heng Sure and I are finding that one needs very little to survive, and even less to be happy! All food, clothes, and shelter are offered to the Sangha as a "field of blessings." It's the same on the road. If what we need isn't offered, we don't need it. If something is offered, we need it. Why? Because it's the heart of giving that is being

planted and nurtured. The world needs more giving so the more people that give, the better for everyone. We are just the field, the harvest belongs to everyone.

We are all one source, one heart, one substance to the ends of empty space. Wherever we are we are always at home. And we spend all holidays with our "family!"

Thanksgiving meal: peanut butter and jelly, nuts, canned beans, lettuce, fruit, and bean curd and left over apple cobbler. The best part was the verse from the Seven Buddhas of Antiquity:

*Seeing the body as unreal is the Buddha's view.
Understanding the mind as illusory is the Buddha's understanding.
One who understands that the body and mind are empty in the
fundamental nature,
How is this person at all different from the Buddha?*

"We were sitting around eating our Thanksgiving dinner and my mom said, 'Those poor monks...' So here I am," said Matt, the editor of the local school newspaper. He made an offering from his family of bread and homemade preserves.

"Tell your mom the offering is well received and that we just look poor on the outside. Inside we're rich and happy."

"Okay!" said Matt. "Will do."

*Like one who gets a treasure store of jewels,
And is ever after free of poverty's suffering,
When the Bodhisattva gets the Buddha-dharma,
He leaves the dirt, his mind is purified.*

*Avatamsaka Sutra
Verse in Praise of Tushita Heaven*

Ahead at bottom of this mesa are the brown rolling hills of the Casmalia oil field dotted with pumping derricks. The little town of Casmalia is in sight. It is quiet with just a sound of a few barking dogs, train whistles, and the lowing of cattle carried up.

HENG SURE, November, 1977:

Humbled Pie

A big little lesson today. In the past I have always been attached to pumpkin pie. It was my favorite food from earliest memories. It was connected with my birthday which fell during the season and holidays hallmarked by pumpkins. Pumpkin pies always meant happy birthday. Lots of ego-strokes.

At Gold Mountain Monastery I intensified my attachment to pumpkin pie. I went through some greedy schemes to get pie that now make my ears burn to remember. For example, after a three-week fast I let it be known that pumpkin pie was my favorite food and the pies began to roll in. Pumpkin bread came from home and like a big-eyed mouse I scarfed down more than I could hold. The result: A prolonged case of diarrhea.

As things happen at Gold Mountain, often one's biggest attachment is used as a teaching device--favorite dharmas suddenly turn into inescapable mind-turning tools. At a certain point, pumpkin pie totally disappeared from Gold Mountain's desert board. For nine months not one pie came through. My greed for them grew so large and their absence grew so obvious that I could not avoid making the connection that something was being taught--if I had eyes to learn it. I resolved to end my desire for pumpkin pies and for all kinds of sweets and foods that I was attached to.

The resolve held and I forgot about pumpkin pie. Still no pies crossed my path, going on a year and a half, until yesterday a gentleman drove out from Casmalia on the morning after Thanksgiving to give us pumpkin pie "because we were humans." I ate my share at lunch and discovered that things have changed inside. After one instant of old flavor memory, I felt a big surge of distaste for the dark yin sweetness that would surely bring clouds to cover my mind in the afternoon. It tasted like ice cream, pop, candy, cookies, and chocolate--like a big unwelcome weight in my system. And it tasted like Christopher. Clearly the value of the pies was the strokes to the ego I received when I ate them, it had little to do with the pies themselves.

HENG CH'AU, November 25, 1977:

A car pulls up on this quiet, empty road. A man walks up, a little hesitant but sincere and kind. He makes an offering of food and water and says, "I don't know anything about you, but I am human and you are human and I can see!"

*His constant wish: to help others
and make them happy.*

*Avatamsaka Sutra
Chapter 12 Part 1*

Six kids and their dog hike across the tall wheat colored grassy oil fields and sit on the roadside fence for an hour watching us approach. A few hop down and then try out bowing themselves. When we reach them it went like this:

"Hi!"

"Hi!"

"We really hope you make it all the way."

"Thanks."

"Bye."

"Bye."

And as the sun sets they hike back home to dinner and we keep bowing.

Called the Abbot about the broken tooth. The Master didn't mince words or let this disciple wallow in self-pity. "Your tooth hurts because of false thoughts about food...afraid you won't get your fill. If it's not better by tonight go get it fixed tomorrow. Be patient, endure what others cannot endure."

I wasn't expecting to hear it so straight. I just stood there in the phone booth holding the phone, not knowing what to say. The Master called this one like it was, too, "Why aren't you talking? Talk to me!"

"Ah, ah...I don't know," I finally blurted to cover.

"This is long distance. It costs money, Why are you not talking...You called to say 'I don't know?'" I quickly handed the phone to Heng Sure and stepped out of the booth. I was sweating and it wasn't even warm outside. It was just the bitter medicine I needed to strike up my spirits. The Master bolted me out of a nose dive.

He vows that all living beings forever escape their sick bodies and obtain the Tathagata's body.

Avatamsaka
Ten Transferences Chapter