

Three Steps One Bow

DAILY RECORDS OF BHIKSHUS HENG SURE AND HENG CH'AU

HENG CH'AU: December 13, 1977: All of the bowing and each state of mind we experience points to one thing: the emptiness of self. All of our problems and difficulties on the pilgrimage and in our lives we can trace back to our selfishness. Seeing through the illusory "me" is what it's all about.

Anyone can end suffering and be happy--deeply happy. Anybody can become nobody. One who is greatly enlightened is called a Buddha. The Buddha must be nobody. How could one be greatly enlightened and still have a self?

Praising someone else's cultivation or virtue is not recognizing your own Buddha-nature. What is really being praised is the Way. "Hey! I can do that too! I can put down the false and be happy, too." Evil and good both return to the doer. Praise the Buddha's name and you will be liberated.

*If there are living beings
Who have not yet resolved on enlightenment,
Once they hear the Buddha's name
They will certainly accomplish Bodhi.*

-Avatamsaka Sutra Chapter 24

HENG SURE: December, 1977: A young man stands silently as two monks bow towards him. His eyes are as large as teacups. Finally he says, "You two are the ones going to San Francisco?"

Heng Ch'au: "One hundred and ten miles north of there to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas."

"And where did you start?"

"L.A."

"Boy, you guys got guts."

Heng Sure(to himself): "Don't know about that but we do have a teacher, precepts, vows, faith, and real work to do. Does that spell guts?"



HENG CH'AU: December 14, 1977: BROCCOLI TEST

A rancher pulling a wagon train of fresh broccoli stopped and offered us more than we could eat in a month. I took a portion and explained that we eat only vegetables and one meal a day. "So you better take more or you will never make it," he said with a laugh.

I thought to myself, "No, we better take less or we'll never make it." This is hard to do: to take just a little and not be greedy for good things. It says in the *Sutra in Forty-two Sections*, "To see something good and not want it is difficult." Make it to where? To no greed, anger, or ignorance. If we get to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas and are still full of wanting good things then we haven't made it to the City. If we bow all the way to the City and still lose our tempers and do upside down things we will have bowed 700 miles without advancing an inch. This is the "broccoli test." It is not measured in miles, it's measured in the mind.

HENG SURE: December, 1977:

Great Universal Buddha's Flower Adornment Sutra
"Worthy leader Chapter"



MANJUSHRI BODHISATTVA

The Chinese title of this chapter could be translated several ways. The character for "worthy" can also mean "quality", "value," or "excellence." The word for "leader" can also mean "head," "foremost," or

"superior." So other ways of rendering the title might be "Top Value," "Foremost Worthy," "Chief Among the Worthy Ones," or "Top Quality."

We all look for value in life, both in material things and in experiences. We often hear people say, "Did it cost a lot?"

"Yes, but it was worth it."

We all want the very best for ourselves; quality goods and high times. But how many of us look for quality and value in ourselves? Who do you know who "tries his best" all the time? How do we judge quality in people?

That's what this chapter of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* is all about. It explains how an ordinary person can transform into a person of superior quality. One can become a Bodhisattva, an enlightened being, a Worthy Leader by studying and practicing the principles in this text. Here is a book of Real Value, worth reading again and again.

At that time, Manjushri Bodhisattva having just spoken the merit and virtue of pure practice which is neither turbid nor confused, wished to reveal the merit and virtue of the Bodhi-mind, so he composed verses and asked Worthy Leader Bodhisattva thusly:

"Manjushri Bodhisattva" possesses great wisdom and tremendous power. Where did he get it? He got it from the work he did in his mind; from the rules he practiced with his body, and from the words he chose not to say with his mouth. Once upon a time Manjushri Bodhisattva was a human being just like you and me. One day it occurred to him that everyone he met was trying to find lasting peace, freedom, and real happiness. He applied his intelligence and his effort to the search for a path to liberation. Because he was sincere and unselfish and diligent, before long he met the Buddhadharma and started to practice its true principles. It was then only a matter of time before Manjushri Bodhisattva transformed his greed, hatred, and stupidity into morality, concentration, and wisdom. Gradually his skill and his power grew into the awesome spiritual gung fu of a Son of the Dharma King. The present Manjushri Bodhisattva wields the vajra sword of prajna wisdom and rides a magnificent lion through empty space. If Manjushri Bodhisattva were to appear in America today, and some say that he is always here, he would probably look very ordinary on the outside. Perhaps he would drive a pick up camper and have a big, friendly dog or two with him. His gaze would be quite direct and his manner would be open, kind, and wise.

Bhikshu Heng Ju met a man just like that in 1974 after a ten-month bowing pilgrimage. Heng Ju didn't recognize the man at the time. He described the encounter in his book *Three Steps, One Bow*. The Venerable Abbot of Gold Mountain Monastery later told Bhikshu Heng Ju that he should have bowed to this man on the spot, because it was none other than Manjushri Bodhisattva himself, manifesting in the world to speak the Dharma for the monk.

In the Worthy Leader Chapter, the topic is merit and virtue, two qualities that all Buddhas have in perfect, full measure. The words merit and virtue don't mean much to most of us because we so rarely meet these qualities in the flesh. For instance, Buddhas can appear in golden bodies complete with 32 other distinguishing marks and 80 more subtle characteristics. This sets them apart as supermen.

Buddhas have 40 teeth and their hands reach down below their knees. Buddhas have purple eyes and perfect, excellent features. When people look at a Buddha their hearts feel washed with happy light.

Where do merit and virtue come from? They come from "pure practices which are neither turbid nor confused." Pure practice means cultivating the Buddhadharma. There are 84,000 ways to practice and any one of them, when practiced purely, will result in merit and virtue and will ultimately help one become a Buddha.

The key is purity in practice. On the bowing pilgrimage we have learned that the difference between clarity and confusion depends on one thing: concentrating the mind.

As the Sixth Patriarch's verse says:

*The mind called wisdom,
The Buddha is then concentration.
Concentration and wisdom equal,
The intellect is pure.*

In other words, when you practice purifying your mind then you are practicing being a Buddha, because all Buddhas come from the mind. The Venerable Abbot of Gold Mountain in his *Ten Dharma Realms Are Not Beyond a Single Thought* expressed this principle:

*If there are people who wish to understand All Buddhas of the three
periods of time, They should contemplate the nature of the Dharma
Realm: The Tathagatas are made from mind alone.*

Buddhism stresses the importance of the mind. All of the Buddha's dharmas instruct us how to purify it. Originally our minds were not impure but as we grew beyond our childhood's innocence we learned how to think. Just in this thinking we forgot our original purity. We grew turbid and confused.

Buddhists practice the Dharma in order to turn our thoughts around, to counter our bad habits and to return to our natural purity. On a cold November morning the turbidity of thought came home to me clearly. We were bowing along an isolated road through Vandenberg AFB. Traffic was sparse, the sun was slowly warming the misted valleys. Everything was calm and tranquil. The peace and silence were conducive to concentrated bowing and I felt no afflictions and no obstacles. Then on the ridge to the left a noise broke out. The noise continued without cease. After two hours it crawled in under my skin and completely turned my solid concentration. The noise was a barking dog. He made it his job that morning to protect that square mile of wilderness from bowing monks. His bark was an irritating two pitched yelp followed by a "ruff, ruff" bass counter-point. He said, "Whee ooroop! Ruff, ruff, ruff," which translated must have meant, "Go away! Yeah, that's right." It was a rough-edged bark, in the stillness of the mountain pass. The barking went on and on. Suddenly I realized that when my false thoughts rattle around in my head they are just as useless and just as raucous as the barking dog. Like a radio in a place of worship, the blare and mutter of thought turns the pure silence of the mind into noisy confusion. When we can turn off the radio, quiet the dog, and still the mad mind, all of nature returns to its original perfection and silence. That's pure practice. It is the "causal ground" for creating the Buddha's merit and virtue.

As we took a break to meditate and eat some fuel for more bowing, the poor sad dog was still barking, still unhappy over us. Try as I might, I could not incorporate his noise into the whole of the environment. It was my own dislike of the dog's bark that caused me irritation. It was not the dog's fault. As the Buddha told Ananda, "All feelings are suffering," and by being attached to my own feelings of like and dislike, I made myself uncomfortable that morning. Basically there was no problem--no difference in nature between a bark and silence, but my false thinking discriminated the two into what Heng Sure liked and what he does not like and my displeasure arose at that point.

I realized at that point that dharmas have no self, where in all of creation is there a single dharma that has my name on it? All dharmas come together because of temporary circumstances. Being loosely bound and constantly moving, things all fall apart before long. Everything returns to its original, unmoving substance.

Perhaps the dog didn't know that he was barking profound Buddhadharma. Perhaps he did. Truly "everything speaks the Dharma" and how clearly this trip reveals the truth that heaven and hell are both made from the mind alone.

Heng Ch'au informs me that this was a coyote, not a domestic dog. I was hearing "the sound of the wild."

Manjushri Bodhisattva wants to share "the wisdom that understands merit and virtue" so he asks Worthy Leader to explain the Bodhi-mind. This can be translated as "Bodhi-heart" or the "thought of enlightenment." It means that a living being has seen through the illusion of his mind, his body, and his self. We have resolved to get free of everything that binds us to suffering, no matter what. The Bodhi resolve, the thought for enlightenment, is the first turning-point in the career of a Bodhisattva. In a following chapter, Dharma-Wisdom Bodhisattva explains that a genuine thought for Bodhi makes one equal to the Buddha in wisdom, in merit, and in virtue, right then and there. This is not an event to be taken lightly.

-continued next issue.