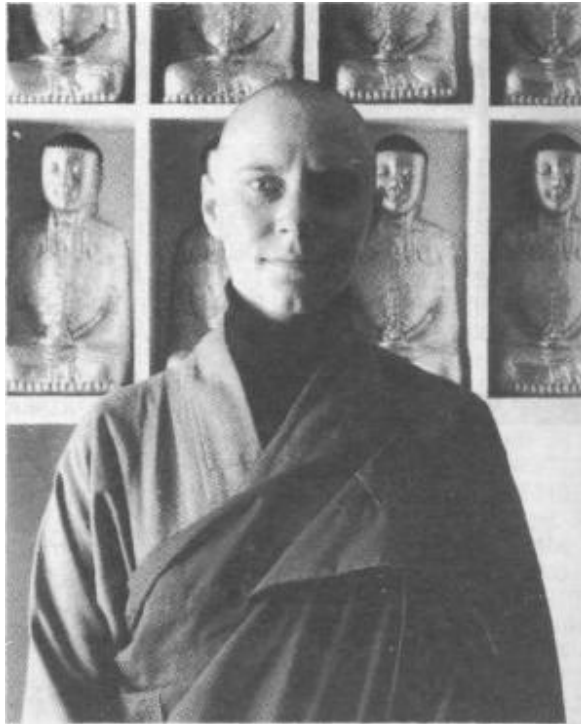


Bodhi Mirror presents--

BHIKSHUNI HENG CHU



THE GOOD KNOWING ADVISOR IS DIFFICULT TO SEE AND DIFFICULT TO ENCOUNTER. UPON SEEING THE GOOD KNOWING ADVISOR, ONE'S MIND IS NO LONGER SCATTERED AND CONFUSED. UPON SEEING THE GOOD KNOWING ADVISOR ONE SMASHES THE MOUNTAIN OF OBSTRUCTIONS. UPON SEEING THE GOOD KNOWING ADVISOR ONE ENTERS THE SEA OF GREAT COMPASSION TO SAVE AND PROTECT ALL LIVING BEINGS.

*-FLOWER ADORNMENT SUTRA
"Entering the Dharma Realm"
Chapter 39*

"There are about twenty of us seated here and there about the room. There is a soft murmuring of people chatting. The air is full of excitement, yet it's a peaceful and relaxed atmosphere. A noise at the kitchen door draws the attention of everyone and suddenly it's very quiet. Voices and footsteps can be heard coming our way; the tension and excitement grows to a peak. The room is filled with light as he enters and the eyes of everyone are fixed upon him. He smiles a warm and gathering-in smile, as if he knows all of us as old friends. He slowly makes his way around the room, looking at each of us. As he walks by me, his awesome strength makes me tremble as if there were an earthquake going on and yet his compassion fills my heart with happiness like I've never felt before.

I have never met such a person before, and yet I know deep within my heart that he is who I have been praying for to come and teach me to change and to be good. He sits down on the sofa and begins to speak. Even though I can't understand a single word, his speech pierces my heart and somehow I deeply understand what he's saying. It's all so strange and yet so familiar. I've waited and searched for who knows how long and now I've found my Teacher once again."

Thus relates Bhikshuni Heng Chu of her first encounter with the Venerable Abbot. Having the good fortune to encounter a Good Knowing Advisor at an early age, she wasted no time disentangling herself from the "stained threads of cause" that bound her to the world, and soon entered the Monastic community.

"If it had to be summed up in one word, being a Sanghan is learning to be unselfish. If we but concentrate on that one word alone, we find we have to entirely reconstruct our lives. In the world, everything we do is for ourselves. In the Sangha we 'enter the sea of great compassion to save and protect living beings.' We set ourselves aside to do things for other beings.

"As human beings endowed with the efficacious capacity to appreciate our spiritual nature and with the intellectual tools to shape our lives and our environment, we are, in a sense, all creators. We are, as it were, factories, or artisans who have the skill to invent materials and mold souls. And yet to date in this Saha world, how can we not be appalled at what we've done! How can we stand back and let the horrifying products of our own handiwork go by as if unnoticed, unrecognized in all their terrifying ugliness and destructive potential?

"'Creation' usually connotes bringing into being something inspiring, something good and peace-giving. Instead, people use their intellect to invent produces which are wrought with negating powers and vindictive energies. Killing and defiling one another is the inevitable outcome of such inventions. Such degeneration is grounded in a lack of self-respect, and has a cumulative debilitating effect on the human spirit.

"What is the solution? What is the saving grace that makes it possible for members of the Buddhist community to retrieve their self-respect while at the same time developing a sense of selflessness based in filial compliance for all beings? The solution is the Precepts coupled with the development of merit and virtue.

"Someone once said to me, 'How can such a small minority (referring to the Sangha community) as this expect to really influence the world?'

"I must ask this in return, 'Who's going to effect a change unless someone tries? People say that in this day and age the evil outweighs the good, but how can that be an excuse for not practicing good and trying to improve the world?'

"Once we rediscover the Precepts and begin to adhere to them, we become acutely aware of the extent to which we have been violating them. For instance, in working to uphold

the Precept against killing, we suddenly sense a dramatic change in our attitude toward other living creatures. We begin to notice how all beings, no matter how small in our eyes, cherish life and fear death. As we continue to uphold the Precepts, we become quieter inside and spontaneously embody a sense of respect for all living beings' right to live. From the outset we must ask ourselves, 'Do I want to die?' The answer is 'no' and it is the same answer that all beings instinctively feel. When we violate this innate desire in beings and assume the right to take their lives, we force resentment to arise in them. Eating their flesh, we ingest their enmity as well and feed our bodies, minds, and spirits with these poisons of hatred, fear, and vindictiveness. When we hold the Precept against killing and refrain from eating the flesh of other beings, we put a stop to the creation of any further debts incurred by taking others' lives. As soon as the intent to take others' lives ceases, then quite naturally peace and trust will pervade the world once again. This happens because at the time that we refrain from eating the flesh of others, we stop feeding those negative vengeful energies into our own systems and when we cease to do that, we no longer transmit those same hateful energies out into the universe. When we stop in taking such energies into our systems, a sense of compassion takes their place. We begin to realize that at one time or another all male creatures have been our fathers and all female creatures have been our mothers. If we understand this kind of compassion, then how can we ever think to eat the flesh of any other creature? How can we bear the thought that we may be eating the flesh of one who at one time was our mother?

"Then, to begin to unravel the complex net of previous karmic debts incurred by violating the rights of others, we set about to amass merit and virtue to nurture our life-giving, creative capacities. What is merit and virtue? The Great Master Hui Neng, the Sixth Patriarch defines merit and virtue as follows:

SEEING YOUR OWN NATURE IS MERIT AND EQUANIMITY IS VIRTUE. TO BE UNOBSTRUCTED IN EVERY THOUGHT, CONSTANTLY SEEING THE TRUE, REAL WONDERFUL FUNCTION OF YOUR ORIGINAL NATURE IS CALLED MERIT AND VIRTUE.

INNER HUMILITY IS MERIT AND OUTER PRACTICE OF REVERENCE IS VIRTUE. YOUR SELF-NATURE ESTABLISHING THE TEN THOUSAND DHARMAS IS MERIT AND THE MIND-SUBSTANCE SEPARATE FROM THOUGHT IS VIRTUE. NOT BEING SEPARATE FROM THE SELF-NATURE IS MERIT, AND THE CORRECT USE OF THE UNDEFINED SELF-NATURE IS VIRTUE. IF YOU SEEK THE MERIT AND VIRTUE OF THE DHARMA BODY, SIMPLY ACT ACCORDING TO THESE PRINCIPLES, FOR THIS IS TRUE MERIT AND VIRTUE.

THOSE WHO CULTIVATE MERIT AND VIRTUE IN THEIR THOUGHTS DO NOT SLIGHT OTHERS BUT ALWAYS RESPECT THEM. THOSE WHO SLIGHT OTHERS AND DO NOT CUT OFF THE "ME AND MINE" ARE WITHOUT MERIT. THE VAIN AND UNREAL SELF-NATURE IS WITHOUT VIRTUE, BECAUSE OF THE "ME AND MINE," BECAUSE OF THE GREATNESS OF THE "SELF," AND BECAUSE OF THE CONSTANT SLIGHTING OF OTHERS.

*GOOD KNOWING ADVISORS, CONTINUITY OF THOUGHT IS MERIT AND
THE MIND PRACTICING EQUALITY AND DIRECTNESS IS VIRTUE.*

"Given such inspiring guidance, we set about with determination to rectify our own character and to instill virtue in others. Thus in our schools we provide positive guidelines to help students persevere their wholesomeness and to change the bad habits they have begun to develop. The Five Precepts of not killing, not stealing, not committing sexual misconduct, not using false speech, and not taking intoxicants supply a framework which is timeless and true. Down to the smallest detail of the children's activities, we concern ourselves with the development of their characters so that they might have the best possible chance to fortify the merit and virtue of their inherent pure self-natures."

Bhikshuni Heng Chu is an active member of the Buddhist Text Translation Society, having finished a translation of Chapter Nine of the *FLOWER ADORNMENT SUTRA*, "*Bright Enlightenment*," and by continually contributing her efforts to help bring the Sutras into publication. She is also member of the rotating team of on-the-spot translators at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. Serving in many areas, she teaches in Instilling and Cultivating Virtue Schools, helps in training novices, and does innumerable jobs that protect and support the Bodhimanda.