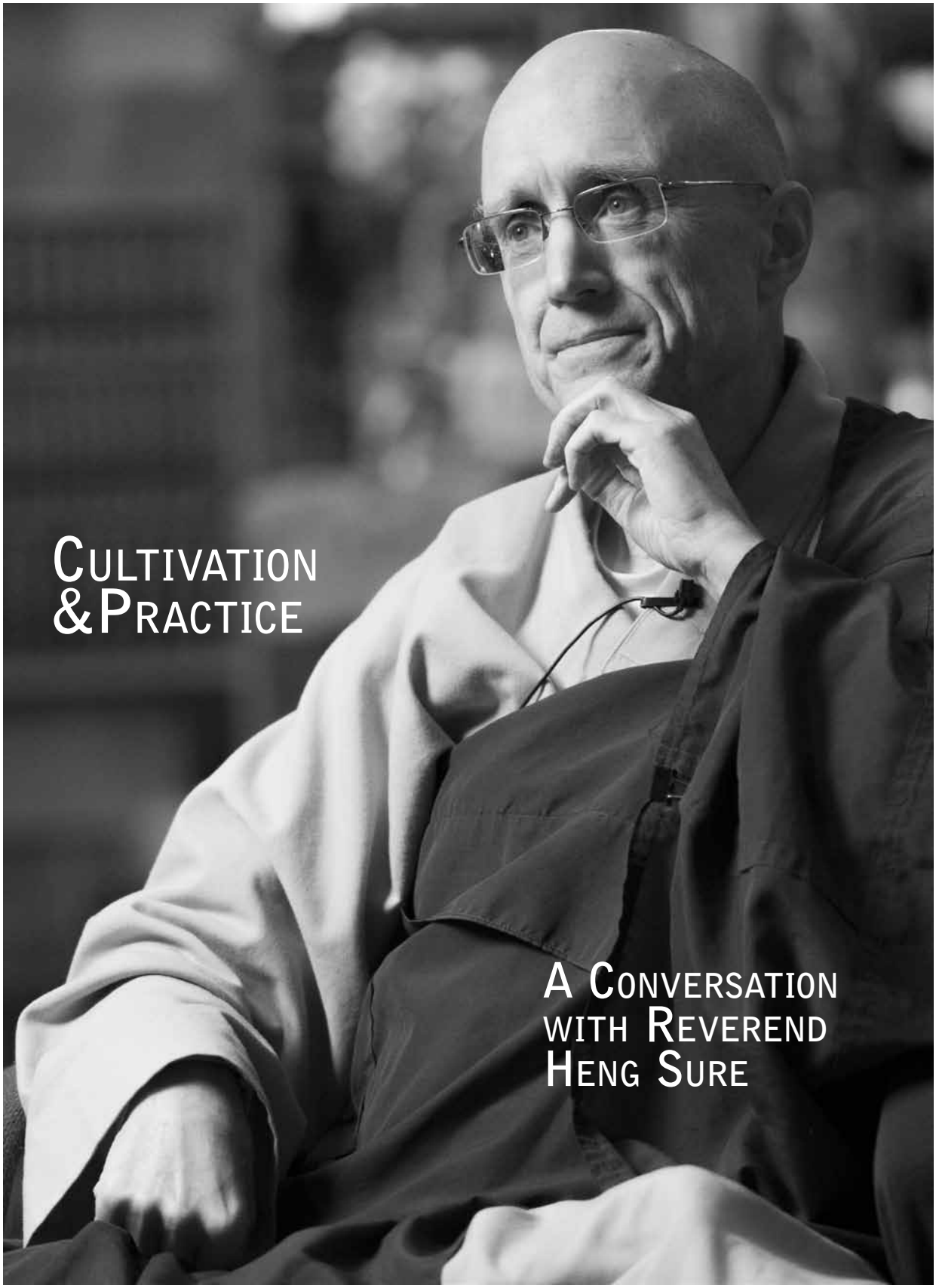

Cultivation & Practice

A Conversation with Reverend Heng Sure

Beginning in the summer of 1977, two American monks in the Chinese Mahayana Buddhist tradition committed to taking three steps and one bow for 800 miles along California's Highway 1. A pilgrimage to bring peace within and without, their journey took them through some of the most beautiful and also some of the most dangerous parts of California. Two and a half years later, they completed their pilgrimage at the steps of the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, in Ukiah, California.

One of these monks was given the name Rev. Heng Sure, or "constantly real." Born into a Christian family in the midwestern city of Toledo, Ohio, Christopher Clowery, hadn't planned on taking refuge and becoming a Chinese Buddhist monk. But as he himself later reflected, "Becoming a monk is a symptom of something deeper, a symptom of deep past conditions."

Before becoming a monk, Clowery was a four-season high school athlete and later lived in an experimental commune while studying at UC Berkeley. After becoming a monk, he took a vow of silence for almost three years. As a creative and compassionate Buddhist, Rev. Heng Sure speaks out against government policies and programs that commit violence in hidden forms. In his lectures, you might find him conveying the meaning of Buddhist sutras with the aid of a guitar and a band of puppets.

In this interview, Rev. Heng Sure shares surprisingly honest, humorous, and poignant stories and reflections from his incredible life journey. —Bela Shah, Audrey Lin

Bela Shah: You grew up in a Christian family in the middle of America in the 1950s. How did you stumble upon the Chinese language and Buddhism?

Rev. Heng Sure: When I was 14 years old, my aunt worked for the U.S. Information Agency and sent me a catalogue about an art exhibit from a Chinese artist. I couldn't stop looking at the Chinese characters in the catalogue. I thought they were so wonderful and they hinted of things from the past. I had to figure out what they meant.

So I started studying Chinese, but I was quiet about it because where I was growing up, everyone was a jock. I would have looked really weird if someone saw me reading Chinese characters!

I went on to a high school that actually offered the Chinese language as a class; it was only one out of three high schools in the entire country that offered it. Imagine that!

In the public library one day, I found a copy of the *Tao Te Ching*. It was both in English and Chinese and I went back and forth between the two languages, identifying the characters. Then right after I put that book down, right next to it was the Sixth Patriarch's *Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra*, which is a Buddhist scripture that was composed in China during the 8th to 13th centuries.

I opened it up and I had an experience like I was in a conversation with the Sixth Patriarch. It was so familiar and I felt like I knew him even though I had no context for it. I mean at the time, I was watching things like the *Mickey Mouse Club* on TV and playing sports, and here's the Sixth Patriarch right in front of me!

At that point, I realized that there was something else going on. So for me, encountering Chinese language, Chinese culture, and Buddhism were simultaneous.

Bela: So then what happened? At what point did you start to meditate and actually practice Buddhism?

HS: I got more serious when I went off to college to a little liberal arts school. As I was moving into my new dorm room on the very first day, I remember opening the door with my suitcases in my hand and my parents right behind me. There on the floor, sitting in full lotus position and meditating, was my college roommate.

Something about his posture gave me a shiver. I recognized it, but not intellectually. I reacted by closing the door because I wasn't sure if I was supposed to go in and interrupt him! His name was David Bernstein and he and I ended up becoming best friends.

Bela: Were you guys meditating in secret in college as well? [laughs]

HS: [Laughing] No, by that point it was pretty hip. And I continued my study of the Chinese language, which was the door that I entered into for all things Eastern. An amazing opportunity came up when Oberlin College offered a Chinese immersion program in Taiwan during my junior summer.

That was a really formative experience. One weekend, we went to Lion Mountain and stayed at a Buddhist Monastery overnight. We were exhausted and crashed on these tatami bunks. Then at 4 a.m. the sound of the chanting woke me up and I had that out

of world experience where the sounds were coming from inside of me and from all around me.

Bela: Wow! So then what happened?

HS: Well I came back to my college after spending 3 months in a monastery in Japan. I learned that my roommate had graduated early, had become a Chinese Buddhist monk and had moved to California!

I was like, "Oh, my goodness! Here I am in Kyoto, kind of playing around, and David Bernstein has now become Hung Yo and lives in a monastery."

So I was aware of that and wondering what my next steps would be since I was about to graduate. Then I heard about this four-year graduate fellowship award that was being offered to 100 students from around the country. In order to win it, you had to demonstrate some commitment to something other than worldly values.

I got an interview and the guy was a professor from the University of Texas. He asks me, "Can you demonstrate your commitment to something other than straight-ahead preparation to work?"

"Ummm… I lived in a Buddhist monastery in Japan and returned home by becoming a merchant seaman."

"Hmm…that's interesting. Do you have anything else?"

"Well, I'm studying mime and can mime for you."

So I performed this mime of someone blowing up a balloon and then it getting so big, that the person gets sucked into it. He liked that, and I got the fellowship. I was on my way to UC Berkeley to study Chinese and Buddhism.

Bela: Did you look up David Bernstein when you got there? What was it like studying Buddhism in Berkeley in the 1960s?

HS: He actually rang me up one day. I was living up in the Berkeley hills in a commune and partaking in all kinds of experimental stuff. So I get this call and he asks me to come across the Bay Bridge to the city to meet his teacher, the abbot. "Remember how we used to talk about the Patriarch and where we might find the living dharma tradition? Did you find it in Japan?"

"Kind of, yeah."

"What was it like? Is it flourishing?"

"Well the monk there is a really good guy."

"No, I'm talking about the three jewels, the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha. Was that flourishing?"

"It's sort of hanging by a thread."

"Well come over and meet the abbot, Master Hua."

"Where are you located?"

"The Mission District."

"Get real! I've been to Japan. Buddhism is mountain streams and pine nuts, etc., and you're in some Hispanic ghetto in San Francisco?"

"You're totally attached. Come over and meet the abbot. Where did we say the Patriarch would be when we talked about it in college?"

"I don't know…probably in a cave somewhere in the Himalayas."

"No, he's here in America. He came this far from China. You can cross the bridge to meet him."

"I don't know… Maybe."

"There's going to be really good vegetarian food."

"Well, ok, I guess I can come."

> "At 4 a.m. the sound of the chanting woke me up and I had that out of world experience where the sounds were coming from inside of me and from all around me."

Audrey Lin: Where was this resistance coming from?

HS: I was allergic to the institution. It was too much structure. I really liked the Alan Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac version of Buddhism from *Dharma Bums* and *On the Road* and the idea of meditating whenever you wanted to. On the other end of this spectrum, David Bernstein had sent me a magazine from his monastery, the Gold Mountain Monastery. I saw an image of these bald, white guys in robes. It looked so pretentious to me.

Audrey: [Laughing] But the food drew you, right? What was your first encounter like with the abbot, the person who ended up becoming your teacher?

LEFT TO RIGHT: DR. MARTIN VERHOEVEN, PHD. [HIS NAME WAS BHIKSHU HENG CH'AU WHEN HE ACCOMPANIED HENG SURE ON THE BOWING PILGRIMAGE.], REV. HENG SURE, NIPUN MEHTA, FABRIZIO ALBERICO

HS: I had a very strange experience. I remember driving my Volvo across the Bay Bridge and parking on 15th Street. At the time, the monastery was right across the street from low-income housing, drugs, and violence. There were shootings and murders outside the door, and the Mission District was not yuppieland, the way it is now.

I scuttled out the door of my Volvo; I didn't want to be out there too long! And I remember this very tall cadaverous looking western monk who opened the door.

"Yes," he said with this deep voice.

"Umm… I'm here for the ceremony, or something like that, for the Buddha?"

Outside the sun was shining, it was a spring day, and Smitty's Body Shop next door was making this loud electric noise.

Inside it was cold and dim. There was incense in the air and all the monks were meditating and sitting still. But it was completely recognizable. Something inside me unknotted and said, "You're home; you're safe; go to work."

Bela: What did you do!?

HS: My conscious mind rejected it, but my deeper mind said, "You're back." It was too much to take in. I turned around and went back out onto the street into the noise and the pollution. But the intensity of it, the cars, the buses, the noise from the body shop was also too much, so I went back into the monastery. It was like a comedy, going in and out like a revolving door.

When I went back inside this time, it was like a spigot had opened up. All the nervousness and tension I'd been carrying for who knows how long just went away, and I felt safe. I thought, "What in the world is going on?"

Audrey: Was it similar to when you heard the chanting in Taiwan?

HS: It was a connection to that, and the feeling was that whatever I touched in both those experiences existed in a timeless place. It wasn't a question of how many years had passed since I'd gone from one experience to another. In this realm, time doesn't exist, and when you're back there, it's not linear anymore; it's a spiral time.

I ate lunch and left and didn't go back for 6 months. The experience was way too something for me!

Bela: Did you see the abbot?

HS: I remember seeing Master Hua and having a headache as soon as I saw him. It was kind of like your mind groaning, "Oh no," because you know it's time to get real, no more playing around. So the bad part of me, the commune part, groaned, "Oh no."

Master Hua was famous for knowing how to teach, and everyone gets taught in a different way, according to what he can learn and what he is able to understand. If you were a 4-month-old crawling around on the floor, he would get down on the floor with that infant. If you were a Confucian scholar and retired with grandchildren, he would sit down with you and recite the Analects from memory for hours and just delight the scholars, because he met you where you were. He was like that with animals, too.

Bela: So how did Master Hua "meet" you?

HS: Six months later Hung Yo called me up and said,

"You should really stop running around outside, come in and take refuge, and officially become a Buddhist. That way at least your feet are on solid ground. We've been meditating for the last five years and you're not interested in getting baptized or becoming Jewish. So why don't you become a Buddhist and get real. Stop looking outside for a bargain."

Taking refuge in Buddhism is like getting baptized in Christianity. So I was like, "Well I don't know."

But then something really interesting happened. I was also an astrologer at the time. (I had to make money somehow!) In the skies in 1973 there was a conjunction of 5 planets that were going to be together in the Sagittarius. Everybody in the astrological world was saying that wherever these five planets land in your chart it's a big deal, so pay attention. I looked and it was right on my rising sign, which is your identity. It's how you project and how you meet the world and it's determined by when you take your first breath and what degree of the zodiac was on the eastern horizon when you came into the world. It moves 360 degrees in 24 hours because it's the rotation of the planet and so for me it was 3 degrees Sagittarius.

So I realized that conjunction hits right on my rising star at 3 pm on July 28, 1973. Whatever is going on in my life at that time is going to be really important for determining my external identity and how I meet the world and how people see me.

On July 27 I got a phone call from Hung Yo and he said, "I just wanted to let you know that for some reason Master Hua said there was going to be a refuge ceremony tomorrow on July 28 at 3 pm. Do you want to come over?"

I was like, "Ok, I can't escape it this time." Hung Yo had been trying to get me to take refuge and now a special, unique refuge ceremony was taking place on July 28 at 3 pm? I wondered if Master Hua was reading my mind. I realized that resistance was futile. So that's how I officially became a Buddhist. But I didn't come back to the monastery for another year after that.

Audrey: But Master Hua found a way to eventually meet you where you were at, right? What was his strategy?

HS: [Smiling] It was through my study of Chinese. I had been studying Chinese for almost 10 years at that point and Master Hua asked me to get involved with the translation of the Buddhist sutras. Master Hua had been lecturing on the sutras every night. I started coming over to the monastery on the weekends to translate and bit by bit, something shifted in my mind and my heart.

"People have a funny impression of monasteries. It's cliché but they think, 'Oh you monks, you just go over there to the bliss of the monastery to escape reality.' But it's actually the opposite. In the monastery, you can't avoid your truth. Whatever you've done with your body, mouth and mind, you meet it head on."

As I began to spend more time at the monastery, it began to seem much more real than my life in the commune, and my life in the commune began to feel very unreal. Outside the monastery, the peaks were too high and the lows were too low and everything started feeling very scattered and insane.

People have a funny impression of monasteries. It's cliché but they think, "Oh you monks, you just go over there to the bliss of the monastery to escape reality." But it's actually the opposite. In the monastery, you can't avoid your truth. Whatever you've done with your body, mouth, and mind, you meet it head on. There is no entertainment or diversions to engage your senses. Your relationships and jobs are often a diversion, but in a monastery, all you have is your reality.

Bela: In what ways did your truth challenge you in the monastery?

HS: The monastics always talk about the "dark night of the soul," a phenomenon that happens after a certain number of years in robes. At some point, something rebels and if you can catch it and transform that energy, you're good for another decade as a monk. If you don't catch it, the dark night of the soul arises and there is a thirst for engagement with the senses.

It's like reaching a plateau. You're coming up nirvana mountain and you reach this arid plateau and yet another chant seems to be way too much. It's a test, and somehow I never went through that test.

I believe it's because in the Mahayana tradition, there's something called the Bodhi Resolve, the resolve to wake up. It's a motivational force and Master Hua would say that it's the single most important thing for sustaining your practice.

The Bodhi Resolve is divided into two parts. In the first part, you say, "I realize that my potential as a human is to wake up and that I have everything I need to be like the Buddha. I have the compassion and the blessings that every Buddha that existed throughout time and space has ever had." The second part is "crossing over living beings," i.e., greed, anger, and delusion. The reason why I'm not a Buddha yet is because I haven't come out of my ignorance and crossed over these living beings.

Bela: But how do you cross over these "living beings"?

HS: Every time I get discouraged or frustrated, and those times exist a lot, I have to plug back into my resolve. I ask myself, "What am I here to do and how do I get there?" The answer is, "I have to wake up." People are suffering a lot. Climate change is going to really hurt us and we're just at the very beginning. When you touch that, you ask, "How can I make it hurt less?"

Bela: How do you actively do that, make it hurt less?

HS: What I enjoy most right now is storytelling and that's where music and puppets come in. There is a very sad story happening right now with the breakdown of the planet and the suffering of species. I try to use parallel stories from the Buddhist sutras to awaken people. There are 1600 separate texts in Buddhism that have the word "sutra" at the end. The Buddha never called them "stories" but whenever someone asked him about a problem, his response was always in the form of a story that the individual could understand. So the sutras arose by solving real-life problems.

In modern society, a very real problem is our diet and the prediction is that by 2025, 50% of American youth will have Type 2 adult-onset diabetes. One in three whites and 50% of minorities are experiencing adult-onset diabetes right now. The food that we eat is making us very sick, and that's a story. Did you know that 50% of American youth who go to serve in the military are rejected because they are unfit? It's called "too fat to fight." What happens when these young people are 60 years old? Diabetes-related diseases are increasing and the cost on healthcare will be enormous.

Bela: But how do you take a story spoken by the Buddha 2500 years ago and relate it to modern times?

HS: Whenever I'm about to lecture from the sutras, my cultivation is to put my palms together in front of my audience and ask the Bodhisattvas for aid and for clarity. Then I open the text and start lecturing without any preparation, other than my daily meditation. My samadhi, the text itself, and the chemistry of the moment are what bring the story to life. To have these words be relevant in our time is amazing.

Audrey: What is a Bodhisattva?

HS: They are awakened beings, here only to wake up others. They live in service to others and not just to humans. They ask, "Where is there suffering? That's where we're going." Mothers demonstrate lots of Bodhisattva energy.

My teacher, Master Hua, had 18 vows that he made at age 19. These are vows that only Bodhisattvas make, but if you asked him if he was a Bodhisattva, he would come back with a stinging retort. He was an extraordinary man and had abilities that go beyond ordinary sense realms. You always had a feeling he was reading your mind and he knew you better than you knew yourself. I never could fool him with my sweet talk!

Among his vows was the vow to be able to fly in order to teach the dharma. I'll just let that sink in for a bit.

Master Hua had no afflictions. If there were times when he was down or upset, you never saw it. I never

saw him confused or angry and I never caught him in a lie and yet he was catching me all the time. He would go into the dark corners of my mind and mirror it back and I would look at him and then look at myself and realize where he was and where I was and how different his state of mind was. And I realized that it was because of practice, the practice of the dharma. His Bodhi Resolve was to live in service and he only lived to wake people up. That touched me and moved me and it made me want to be like him.

Bela: Is strengthening your Bodhi Resolve what inspired your walking pilgrimage?

HS: That was part of it. It was also the Buddhist *Flower Garland Sutra*. When I read it, I felt like I was a piece of iron and the sutra was a magnet. If there is anything that made me a Buddhist monk in this lifetime, in a miraculous and magical way it's my connection with that book.

Bela: What are some of the messages from that sutra that really struck you?

HS: It's about a pilgrim by the name of Sudhana, or "good wealth." He goes from one teacher to another in search of truth. After learning all he can from the first teacher, this teacher says, "If you really want to know how to cultivate the Bodhisattva path, there is another teacher down the road." Sudhana bows to him and goes down the road. He goes to 53 teachers, and in each case, he is learning how to serve. Twenty-two of the teachers are women and each one of them teaches him about compassion, each encounter is a story. He looks into his shadow and he sees things that really scare him and he is encouraged not to be afraid.

Sudhana is a very generic pilgrim; he is faceless without a background so that you can put yourself into his life. He inspires you to think how you can be a little less selfish. The Bodhisattva is always being challenged to go beyond the division and go deeper where everything integrates into one.

Bela: Can you share stories from your pilgrimage where you encountered these living beings arising within you? How did you cross over them?

HS: There were all kinds of stories. Some were outright miracles and others illustrated the principles of the sutras right there on the highway, making the sutras come alive.

> "It's just like the drops of sweat on the plate after the last piece of toast is eaten. That's how long human life lasts."

For example, we were bowing through Arroyo Grande city. It was a really hot day, everyone else was taking shelter in the shade and yet we made a vow to keep bowing. When we arrived at a turn-off, we saw a general store and the temptation was to jump into the air conditioning. But I knew that if I did that, it would mess with my mind, create attachment, and make me feel like I cheated somehow.

So we decided to take a 20-minute writing break under the shade of a tree. As we were writing, this drunk man came up to us. You could see that he was lonely and bored and suddenly he sees two monks bowing on the highway, people he thinks are lower than him so he can let out on us.

He comes up to us and slurs, "What do you think you're doing? You think this is helping the world?" He's really about to give us some trouble, but we just keep writing. Suddenly this pick-up truck comes roaring up with Arroyo Grande Fire Department written on the side and this guy jumps out.

"Oh there you are! How are you? My name is Norman Hammond and I've been looking for you guys. I know you're making this pilgrimage for world peace and I'm so impressed by what you're doing and my wife baked these pies for you. Do you eat pies? I've been doing a lot of reading in Buddhism and I think it's great that you're bringing this into America. We talk about this all day long in the firehouse and I want you to let me know if there is any way I can help you out. We'll be watching up ahead to make sure you're safe. Good luck fellas, God bless."

After that, the drunk guy looks at us and mumbles,

TWO MONKS BOW THROUGH BIG SUR ALONG THE PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY.

"I think I'd rather be an old drunk than what you do." Norman Hammond completely took the wind out of his sails!

Down the road two days later it's lunch time and the red pick-up truck comes up again. Norman Hammond asks if he can join us for lunch and starts talking about the burning house in the Buddhist *Lotus Sutra*. In this burning house there are children inside and they don't realize it's burning down all around them because they are too distracted by their toys and games.

"That's just the way it is in real life," he says. "So many times I have gone into a burning house to save someone and they run back in for some possession and end up dying. It happens all the time. Boy, we're just asleep. What I like about Buddhism is just the way it tells the truth." Then he asks us, "You know what human life is like?"

"What is human life like Norman?"

"It's just like the drops of sweat on the plate after the last piece of toast is eaten. That's how long human life lasts."

That's a story of the principles of the sutras coming alive right before us.

Bela: How did Master Hua respond when you told him you wanted to do this pilgrimage?

HS: He turned me down six times and for various reasons. One reason was that Marty hadn't showed up yet and another time a tsunami had hit southern CA and washed away part of Highway 1. I didn't start bowing until a year and two months after I thought I wanted to go.

I had to really learn to give up my ideas of what I thought was best and just follow instructions. And without my teacher it wouldn't have happened. There were really three of us on the pilgrimage. Invisibly he was protecting us, but we had to bow every bow.

Bela: You also mentioned experiences that were out right miracles. What do you mean?

HS: We were in Malibu bowing north on Highway 1 and there was one duty captain from their police department who really liked us. His name was Officer Johnson. He said, "I want to keep you both safe, and I strongly advise you to stay far over to left of the highway. Also, there is a rough section of the road

coming up so be extra careful. By the way, my wife has baked these cookies for you. You guys keep it up and we'll take care of you!"

Then one day he drives up to us and asks, "Can you, umm… you know the robes you're wearing? Can you wear the red robe that the old monk behind you is wearing? Because you can see that a long ways away. Our post officer drove by and saw the old monk with the red robe and said that's what the other ones ought to be wearing because it's visible and less of a traffic hazard."

We paused for a moment and then responded, "Sure. Umm, we don't wear the red robe because it's special."

There was no old monk, only the two of us. When we reached San Francisco, we asked the lay woman who was taking care of Master Hua's food where he was that day in July. She thought for a while and then said, "Oh, that day, yeah I remember! We were talking to him in his reception room and then he suddenly got that far-off look in his eyes and he stood up and went to his quarters. Then 3 hours later he came out and said, 'They're ok now.' We never knew what that was all about! What was that about?"

It's pretty clear that it was only Master Hua's protection that got us through the pilgrimage. We had guns leveled at us 2 or 3 times and several encounters with gangs.

In Los Angeles, we met a gang by Dodger Stadium, and their thing was white. They were Hispanic and their complexion was chalk white with a dribble of blood coming out of their mouths, and they wore white clothes. We weren't sure if they were ghosts or if they were human. They were really weird and they followed us for a while, just keeping their car a few paces behind us and sometimes they would get out of their car and just stand next to us as we were bowing, silently, not talking. They were kind of protecting us but they weren't. We weren't sure what they were doing. They were there for 3 or 4 days!

Bela: I read in your letters to Master Hua that you could only use four "weapons" to protect yourselves against danger: joy, kindness, compassion, and equanimity. Was it hard to practice these when you felt fear?

HS: Well as you know, I had taken a vow of silence during the entire pilgrimage. And I'm a language person! Growing up, because I wasn't a fighter, I had to use my words to keep myself safe. So words were big for me and when you take that away, suddenly all these vulnerabilities come up. And Marty, my companion and protector on the pilgrimage, was told by Master Hua not to use violence even though he was a black belt. Like you said, he could only use the power tools of kindness and compassion to protect me.

So here we are, these two white, middle-America kids bowing along the roads. Our only salvation was in the method; simply bow and recite the name of the sutra and transfer the merit. If I'm seeing some ghost corpse person standing beside me on the freeway and my mind is blocking my heart from transferring merit to him, then simply come back to the method. Keep bowing. It's called bowing with a single mind, bowing to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, and hoping for world peace. We had to keep faith in the method.

Remember I had been a graduate student so I was used to thinking on three levels, and I had to cut through all of that and keep my mind focused on one method and trust that it would transform me into a better person—that my consciousness would go to wisdom and my selfishness would go to compassion.

"We weren't sure if they were ghosts or if they were human. They were really weird and they followed us for a while, just keeping their car a few paces behind us and sometimes they would get out of their car and just stand next to us as we were bowing, silently, not talking."

FIRST BOWS, GOLD WHEEL MONASTERY, SOUTH PASADENA, CA.

And if I could do that, if I could trust in that, then everything else would be ok. My job was to shut up and bow.

Bela: So that's the power of bowing after every three steps.

HS: There is one more story that comes to mind. There's a place called Lincoln Heights on the edge of Chinatown in Los Angeles, and we were told by everyone not to pass the high school when it was out of session because we didn't want to mess with high school students. This was only 3 weeks into our pilgrimage, mind you. On the way towards the school, we ran into a detour that took us 3 blocks out of our way, so as soon we approached the school, the bell rang at 3:50 pm.

Suddenly we're surrounded by all these kids and they're going, "What the hell? What are you doing? This is so far out." And "Hey monk, I thought you were poor, look at those Chuck Taylors and Converse hightops! Where did you get those?"

I just found them in the closet. I had no idea what brand they were! We just put our minds into the bowing and told ourselves, "Don't fight or resist, just pray."

Bricks and concrete start being thrown at us from across the street and then these two really large black girls come and stand between us and the bricks and warn the others, "You all quit that! They aren't doing no harm. You quit that or you'll have to deal with us!"

So we're going, "Phew." We continue bowing down the hill and I don't hear any sounds for a long while. I couldn't get up and look around since we were bowing. But when we reach the curb, I stand up and straighten my robe and look behind me. I couldn't believe what I saw.

There were 28 high school students in a line bowing behind us. They're all going, "Haha, this is cool man. Try it! haha." After about 30 minutes they're like, "Okay monks, that was cool and weird. You still going to be here tomorrow?"

We thought we were done for the day and we're now in Chinatown. We stood up after the last bow to meet these big mean Chinese gang guys with dark glasses, scars, and tattoos blocking our way. Marty and I are thinking, "This is a hard way to end the day!"

Then one guy in the middle asks with this low, rough-sounding voice, "You're doing this for world peace?"

"Yes."

"You speak Chinese?"

"No. He does, but he can't talk."

"How long are you going to do it?"

"Well, we're heading 800 miles north."

"Just like that, bowing all the way? All right! As long as you're in our territory, you've got nothing to worry about, you're safe. We like what you're doing."

You stick with the method and that's the best protection. Bow with a single mind.

Bela: Do you still bow now that you're back in monastery life?

HS: I don't have a daily practice of bowing now, but it's always on my mind. I haven't stopped bowing in a way.

Bela: How do you transform your anger when you're not physically bowing?

HS: You use patience and sit with the fire. You listen to the sounds of the world. If anger is still rising inside, don't move because you still have work to do. You must transform the anger because anything you do with anger inside will set fires outside. At a certain point if your own fires can become light instead of heat, you shine this light outwards and help wake people up. You do whatever it takes. You speak, you sing, you explain, you do puppet shows in a way that people can hear. If they can't hear, you have to wait.

You also have to have some wisdom. Wisdom recalls what happened the last time you let the anger out. How did that work out for you? You probably felt horrible afterwards. Letting the anger go, whether it's righteous anger or self-defense or whatever, you remember that it was a disaster. You begin to see anger as a tool that is usually much more destructive than it is helpful. You have to wait it out, which is different from suppression. Suppression is going to come out of the side like when you press water down on a running hose.

Instead, what you do is go back and say, "I'm not going to get angry this time. Fire is not the tool I want to use." Then ask yourself, where did the anger come from? The Buddha says mostly anger comes from frustrated desire. You wanted someone to recognize you, for example. You look at that and ask, "Who is the 'me' in there who wants to be famous?" It's an

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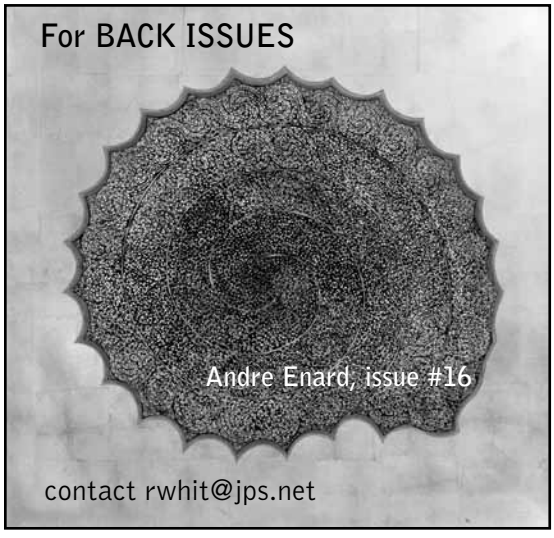
illusory "me," a constructed "me." Why not rejoice in happiness for the person who gets recognition? The desire goes away and then the anger is gone.

Ask yourself "How long am I going to run through my life pursuing pleasure and running from pain?" When you ask this, you realize there has to be another option. And as you get older you realize it's harder to run from the pain. The third alternative is to sit still and figure it out. Watch, observe, and hear the sounds of the world. Most of the sounds have to do with running from pleasure and pain.

So if you can hear the sounds of the world and figure that out, you ask, "Is this all there is?" No, there is more, but it's inside. Make that Bodhi Resolve and ask, "How do I wake up?" Cross over living beings. If you want to get serious about waking up, pay attention to your next false thought and cross over it.

Anger is a huge amount of energy. Reclaim it and recycle it. Use that rising energy and transform it into light. ◆

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