

## Chapter I

### From Honan to Chiang-nan

#### A Resolution Made in Ignorance

Although I renounced lay life at fourteen [in 1934], the havoc wreaked by the Anti-Japanese War forced me to wait until my twenty-fifth year [in 1945] before I received my first master's kind permission to set out in search of spiritual instruction. That was the year of victory against the Japanese, and it was a year when the Communist boss Mao Tse-tung's attempts to seize power were at a frantic pitch. It was an especially difficult time to leave my home district of Yung-ch'eng County in Honan Province: transportation was not convenient and the bandits infesting the hills posed an obstacle. The bandits kept under cover by day and came out at night, often showing up where least expected, so travelers who were not careful could be carried off. After being carried off, victims were stripped of every shred of clothing and beaten half to death or buried alive.

Because I had been born in the North [in Honan], when I went south to seek instruction my fellow students called me "Guy with a Northern Brogue."<sup>1</sup> I did not like the sound of it at first, but as time passed I did not mind. Someone might well want to ask, "Why were you, a northerner, determined to go south to seek instruction?" There were two reasons for this. The first was that in the South there were many large-scale public monasteries like Chin-shan in Chen-chiang, Kao-min in Yang-chou, T'ien-ning in Ch'ang-chou, Pao-hua in Chu-jung, and T'ien-t'ung in Ningpo. All these were giant refining furnaces where men were wrought into accomplished monks. No matter what sort of human scrap metal you were to begin with, you had only to stay several years in such a place, and your every movement and posture would convey that sort of impressive poise that makes people feel: "Here is someone special." This is only external behavior, but in this age of the Decay of the Law<sup>2</sup>, if one wants to preside over a place of truth<sup>3</sup> and be a master and example to others, it is necessary to undergo this basic training. The second reason was that the scenic beauty, temperate climate, abundant natural wealth and greater number of "goodly friends"<sup>4</sup> in the South made for an environment where attainment in spiritual study was much easier. For these two reasons, teachers who held

high hopes for their disciples would often encourage them in many ways to study in the South, hoping they would become luminaries of Buddhist doctrine and so "bring extensive benefit to men and deities." Although my decision to study in the South was influenced by these two reasons, I resolved to go South without really knowing what was in store for me and without encouragement from my teacher. Owing to my ignorance I tasted quite a bit of bitterness and underwent much hardship, but now, giving it careful thought, I realize this is the one thing in life I can take most comfort in, because my rugged and arduous journey led me, in the end, onto the path of life I wished to travel.

### A Journey Tearfully Begun

There was a sobering foretaste of winter in the air on that clear autumn morning when I shouldered my tiny bundle and, with a multitude of feelings welling up in my heart and childishly uncontrolled tears running down my face, bowed farewell to my master and set out on my journey. Buddhism in Honan had been crushed by the "Christian general" Feng Yü-hsiang, and by the time I set out, ninety percent of the province's pristine, solemn places of truth had already become vacant and dilapidated temples, as in these lines:

The old temple, lampless, is lit only by moonlight;  
Its triple gate is gaping, sealed only by mist.

The better temples were changed into schools and army camps, their scriptures and images vandalized with impunity and the temple lands divided and taken. Consider for a moment how the monks who depended on temples for a livelihood fared under the circumstances.

Yung-ch'eng is the easternmost county in Honan, and the small temple where I became a monk was on a mountain in the eastern extremity of Yung-ch'eng, at its border with Hsiao County of Kiangsu. Nearby to the southeast was Su County of Anhni. Since ancient days this had been an area "ignored by three provinces". Because of its "advantageous position", the little temple where I took vows was like a fish escaped from a net. Nevertheless, after eight years of depredations by Japanese soldiers, militia members and bandits, there was hardly enough food to live on, let alone money for my travelling expenses. The day before my departure I scurried about trying to put together some money. I did collect a little sum, but no matter how I figured it, it would only get me halfway to my first destination,

Nanking. In order to have a few pennies in reserve for an emergency, I had no choice but to ask for accommodations in temples along the way.

### A Humiliating Stop at a Roadside Temple

To "hang up one's bundle" [*kua-tan*] or "hang up one's robe" [*kua-ta*] is used in Buddhist parlance to mean put up for the night. This is because a monk travelling on foot can, with the permission of the abbot, hang his robe and alms bowl on hooks in the monks' sleeping room and take his meals and rest there. (During my search for knowledge, experience taught me that it does not always work out that way.) At that time, since I had just left my home temple and had not yet taken monastic precepts, I had neither a robe nor an alms bowl, and I did not know the slightest thing about the rules for "hanging up one's bundle." Technically I was not in a position to ask for accommodations, but the exigencies of my journey made me give it a try. Fortunately, most of the abbots I met were compassionate elders. Seeing that I was young and determined in spite of all hardships to seek spiritual knowledge, most of them sympathized with me. They opened for me the "door of convenience," received me warmly, and gave me food and lodging. When I took my leave, some of them even gave me dried food to eat along the way. However, there is such a world of difference in the hearts of men, that it is difficult to generalize about them: a person receives widely different treatment at the hands of different people. One thing that happened to me on my southward journey is an example of this.

One day before dusk, the soft and somewhat chilling rays of the evening sun cast long shadows of people, trees, buildings, livestock nibbling on wheat sprouts and everything else that stood more than a few inches above the ground. The shadows were stretched so long I could hardly recognize my own. I was a young monk, braving all sorts of dangers and walking alone in search of spiritual knowledge. With my bundle on my back, facing a cold, desolate wind, I trod toward my oddly distorted shadow until I came to a temple near a village. I had nothing more in mind than eating a meal, staying the night and being on my way bright and early the next day. I went to the gate and took a look. The temple was built facing south, and just inside the gate was a large threshing floor. The temple platform was raised about five feet above the threshing floor, and the whole area was surrounded by a wall of earthen brick. The only growing things around the temple were some tall trees already denuded of leaves, their stark bareness unpleasant to my eyes. A path led from the gate to the shrine hall. There was a chamber on the east side and one on the west. The walls too were made of earthen

brick, and the roofs were thatched with corn leaves and wheat straw. The shrine hall, built of red brick and gray tiles, had become terribly dilapidated through age and neglect. In the empty courtyard grew an old locust tree, on which long and short pieces of red and yellowhomespun cloth hung flapping in the wind. The flapping motion seemed to dispel some of the desolation of the courtyard, but actually added to the eerie atmosphere of the place. I strode into the courtyard, looking from side to side, but the buildings were quiet and there was no sign of anyone. Not knowing where the guest room was, I put my bundle down on the stone platform before the central hall. I dusted off my clothes, entered the shrine hall, and bowed down to the Buddha three times. When I came out, a monk suddenly appeared at the door of the east chamber and directed a cold stare at me. He was over fifty, of medium stature, and wore a black quilted jacket and trousers. Just as I was about to press my hands together in greeting, he turned quickly and disappeared through the door. Seeing this unfriendly attitude, I thought, "Oh no! It looks as if I won't get a meal and a place to stay tonight." But as the saying goes, "When standing beneath another's eaves, dare you hold your head high?" "All right. To keep my stomach from singing 'The Stratagem of the Empty City,'<sup>5</sup> and because I'm afraid of what might happen if I walk at night, I'll lower my head to him." Thereupon, I picked my pack up and strode bravely into the chamber. My behavior seemed to catch my inhospitable brother of the cloth by surprise. He was hurriedly clearing food and a basket of steamed buns from the table, but as soon as he saw me, he acted as if he did not know where to put the things in his hands. He stood there giving me an ugly stare and holding the bun basket. I calmly put down my bundle, walked over to him, and said, "Sir, are you the head monk of this temple? I would like to impose on you for a night's stay in your precious *caitya*. Please have compassion for me, sir."

I thought these two polite sentences would dispose him to treat me with kindness, as had happened before when I encountered kindly abbots, and that like them he would throw open the door of convenience, receive me warmly with food and lodging, and thus make my predicament "fall away as if touched by a keen blade." Unexpectedly, I was sadly mistaken. Not only did my polite greeting fail to win his goodwill, he gave me a not-so-polite talking to besides. After hearing my request, he put the bun basket down heavily on the stove and said with a scowl: "What business do you have running around the countryside in this time of disorder? I've never laid eyes on you: why should I risk letting you stay the night? It's not dark yet. Hurry up and walk three and a half miles to the east, and you'll come to a temple. It's a big one and there are plenty of people there: you'll be able to put up for the night. I won't have you here." Then he reached into the bun basket

and handed me two hard, dark buns<sup>6</sup>, saying, "Hey, take these." He took a large brass padlock off the stove and made as if to go out and lock the gate. I put the buns down on the table, pressed the palms of my hands together and said, "Sir, you say that now is a time of disorder, that you don't know me and that you don't dare to let me stay the night. That is understandable, but I plead with you, sir, to trust me. I assure you that I'm not a bad person. Also, I have a good reason for traveling on foot. I'm not just running around the countryside. Please sir, do a good deed and let me stay the night. I'll leave at daybreak tomorrow, all right?" He listened with great impatience and answered, "There is nothing stamped on your forehead that shows whether you're a good person or a bad one. Hmph! Trust you? These days...Enough of your talk; get out! I'm going to lock up. I'm going to lock up."

I have always had a difficult time cultivating the virtue of forbearance, especially in my early twenties, when a few words of disagreement could get me into an argument. This time, however, I showed the utmost forbearance. In spite of the fire of anger burning fiercely in my heart, I heeded the head monk's wish. Shouldering my bundle, I went out into the gloomy night and walked toward the hardships that awaited me.

### Trouble on a Dark Road

By that time I had reached Hsiao County in Kiangsu. Although Hsiao County bordered on Yung-ch'eng and the customs of the inhabitants were similar, there was quite a difference between law enforcement in the two areas. As I have mentioned before, my home district was in an area "ignored by three provinces." For many years it had been in continuous turmoil, and the peasants had enjoyed little of peace and tranquility. There were the Japanese devils, the Communist Eighth Route Army irregulars and the bandits — who were almost the same as the Communists. All of these held power over our area in succession. It was as regular as clockwork: when one group left, the next followed close behind. They sucked the people's life-blood dry, until the area was practically in the plight of "nine vacant houses out of ten." Every time a group of armed men moved into the area they set themselves up as kings, and the lives of the peasants fell into their hands. Anyone who dared stand up to them was liable to bring death upon himself. This being so, the approach of twilight found every family locking its doors and no one stepping outside without good reason. If anything stirred outside, they could only blow out their bean-oil lamps and peer through the cracks in their doors.

The situation was much better in Hsiao County, where the county seat was occupied by Japanese devils, but villages far from the city were controlled by anti-Japanese guerilla units. The area controlled by guerrillas occasionally suffered bothersome forays by Japanese devils and the Eighth Route Army, but these, like foxfire flickering in the hills, ended almost as quickly as they began without posing a serious threat to people's lives. However it was, to be sure, a time of disorder, and good men did not have the word "good" stamped on their foreheads, so even though the guerrillas were fighting the War of Resistance for the people's sake, they had to be extremely strict about inspecting travelers to guard against the movements of traitors and Communists. Such an inspection led to my spending a night in a broken-down room with nothing to drink all night but draughts of cold wind.

It happened like this: the curtain of night was gradually falling as I left the little temple, and I could not help thinking of the moral darkness that was also spreading through the world of men. There I was, a young man risking the dangers of the night for the sake of a spiritual quest. Dragging my fatigued body and fighting the pangs of hunger in my miserably empty stomach, I struck out on unsteady legs in the direction of the "large temple with many monks." Before long, a wide riverbed appeared ahead. The water was gone, but the road across the riverbed was piled knee deep with fine sand. When I pulled out my left foot, my right foot sank in; no sooner had I extricated my right foot than my left foot was buried. Dark, dense rushes lined the road. Every gust of wind produced a rustle as if a wild animal were passing through, making the hair on my neck stand up in bone-chilling fear. I wanted to speed up my steps and get across quickly, but the unrelenting sand seemed to be toying with me. The faster I tried to go, the tighter it clung to my feet; the tighter it clung to my feet, the more difficult walking became. By the time I reached to opposite bank, I was panting with exhaustion and could not move another step, so I threw down my bundle and sat down to rest.

I had just sat down when a voice rang out behind me: "Hey, what are you sitting there for?" I turned my head and saw a burly fellow walking toward me. Instinctively I stood bolt upright in a hurry, and he edged up even closer. He looked at me and my bundle and asked, "Are you a monk?"

"Yes," I said.

"Where are you from?"

"From Pao-an Mountain."

"Where are you going?"

"To Huang-tsang Valley."

"Why are you sitting there in the dark?"

"I got tired crossing the riverbed. I'm resting."

"What were you doing today? Why are you walking at night?"

"I planned to stay at the little temple across the river, but the head monk wouldn't let me. He said there is a big temple to the east and told me to go stay there, so I had no choice but to feel my way ahead."

He hesitated a moment, then said, "Hmph. Put that bag on your back and let's go to my unit."

With that he pulled something from his waist and waved it around. I knew it was a gun and realized that anything I said under these circumstances would be useless, so I did as he said. I shouldered my bag and, repeating the holy name of Kuan-yin Bodhisattva under my breath, tottered in the direction he pointed.

"Faster! Faster!" he urged repeatedly as he walked behind me. Hungry, tired, and scared as I was, it was not easy to speed up, but I bore the strain. With my jaw clamped tightly, I hurried forward. We trotted for about twenty minutes and came to a sizeable village; after making a few turns, we entered the courtyard of a large house. By the lamplight that shone from the main room, I saw two men sitting by the door who got up and walked toward us when we walked into the courtyard. "I have a monk for you. Would you like to interrogate him a little?" my gun-toting friend said jocularly and then walked away. The two men shone their flashlights from my head to my toes. They ordered me to open my bag, carefully inspected everything in it, frisked me, and queried me on my destination and home district. I answered all their questions honestly. After more searching, they asked if I were telling the truth. "It's all true." Then one of them said, "All right, since you're telling the truth, we won't make it difficult for you. Take your bag to the west chamber and sleep there, and we'll release you in the morning." With that, they both entered the main room.

Praise be to Kuan-yin Bodhisattva! Their last few words made me feel like a prisoner on death row who has just learned of his pardon!

### Contemplating Rain at Sacred Spring

What he called the "west chamber" was certainly not a room complete with door, windows and furniture, but a drafty, thatched lean-to which could not have been in a worse state of disrepair. However, under the circumstances I could only fortify myself with the thought that "since it has



come to pass, one should be at peace with it." So I walked into the west chamber, chose a corner in which to place my bag, and sat down against it. I must have been quite fatigued, because I had not sat long before I drifted off to sleep. When I awoke the red sun of morning was well above the horizon. Every muscle and bone in my body was paralyzed with aches and pains; I could hardly bring myself to move. Nevertheless, considering the long road ahead, I had no choice but to brace myself against the wall and stand upright. Once erect I flexed my limbs and put my bag in order; I was just about to take a look outside when my friend of the night before approached me. I nodded to him and asked, "Sir, can I go now?" He nodded briskly and answered, "You can go! You can go! But we put you to too much of an inconvenience. I'm very sorry."

I forced a laugh and said, "Not at all. Not at all. Thank you." With that I picked up my bag and, not even taking time to wash my face, walked out of that west chamber and the courtyard and the gate outside. Well! I had, after a fashion, stumbled singlehandedly through my first difficult encounter.

Having left the front gate, I soon found myself on a small street crowded with traders doing business in wheat and other goods. Such a sight had not been seen in my home district for a long time, and I could not suppress a nostalgic pleasure at seeing it. After walking a few steps along this street, I sat down in front of a food stand and ordered a bowl of hot-and-sour soup, a plate of fried noodles and four steamed buns. After eating my fill, my body immediately felt warm and my spirits lifted. The hunger, cold and fatigue of the night before disappeared like fog on a sunny morning. After paying for the food and asking the road to Sacred Spring Monastery [Sheng-ch'uan Ssu], I turned toward the slowly rising morning sun and pushed ahead one step at a time.

Sacred Spring Monastery is the temple where Dharma Master Chih-tu, presently at Shan-tao Monastery in Taipei, renounced lay life to become a monk. Located on the slope of a mountain northwest of the county seat, it was one of the most famous and scenic sights in Hsiao County. To the rear and on both sides were nothing but high mountains and steep ridges, while in front lay Tai-shan Lake. Inside the monastery grew shrubs and flowering plants that remained green throughout the year, while the environs were planted with pine, cypress, peach, pomegranate, pear and date trees. Such surroundings lent an air of tranquil elegance and solemnity to the monastery. It was truly a rare and sacred place.

A cold, deliciously pure spring issued forth from a stone fissure to the east of the monastery. It is said that men of means from as far away as Hsü-chou often sent people to fetch the water for brewing tea. What is more, regardless of the weather and the time of year, in torrential rain and drought



alike, the spring neither increased nor decreased but kept up the same steady trickling flow. Because of these wonders it was named "Sacred Spring." The monastery was built in the vicinity of the spring and took its name from it.

I arrived at Sacred Spring Monastery right at lunchtime. As soon as I said I was from Pao-an Mountain, an old monk welcomed me politely. He called a lay workman to bring me a basin of water, then told me to go to the kitchen and help myself to the food. He treated me as kindly as a member of the family, and I was deeply moved.

After lunch the old monk had something to do in town, so a young *bhiksu* kept me company. We were both young and had never seen each other before, so we sat silently for a while without finding anything to say to one another. Just as I was starting to feel uneasy, he took my bag in his hand and said, "You must be pretty tired. Go upstairs and have a nap." He took my bag to the second floor of a small building next to a place called Embracing Greenery Hall, and I followed him, delighted. He said, "This is the guest room. The bedding is all here. Go ahead and sleep, and I'll call you when it's time for supper." Without a moment's hesitation I took off my quilted robe, ducked my head under the covers and was soon breathing the long, slow breath of deep sleep.

Upon awakening I went downstairs and saw the young monk on the portico of Embracing Greenery Hall, reading a book. As soon as he saw me, he called for a workman to prepare a basin and towel, and grinningly said, "Last night when I went upstairs to call you to supper, I tried several times but couldn't wake you up. I figured you must have been through a lot the last few days, so I didn't dare disturb you any more. Did you have a good night's sleep?"

I was embarrassed to hear this and said, "Just now when I woke up and saw the light outside, I was so mixed up I thought it wasn't dark yet. I had to look out the window before I realized this is the morning of another day." Hearing this, he laughed so hard the tears came to his eyes. After he had laughed his fill, we went to breakfast.

I had planned to take my leave and go to Ching-fan Monastery in Pai-t'u after breakfast, but the monk insisted on my resting another day. "That's what the old monk wants," he explained. Then, pointing at the sky, he said, "Look, it's about to rain. How can you go?" Sure enough, in a little while, a fine steady drizzle began to fall. I laughed, "A long time ago someone told me a story that had this moral: 'When a guest stays on in rainy weather, it is the weather and not his host that bids him stay.' But from the looks of things that sentence should be changed to 'When a guest stays on in rainy weather, it is both the weather and his host who bid him stay.'" He was

delighted to hear this.

Sitting there doing nothing would have made me seem incapable of using my time, so I borrowed an umbrella from the monastery, walked out the main gate and strode alone along a path winding through a grove, quietly contemplating the mist and rain over lake and mountains. Though the original face of the lake and mountains was draped in dense mist and fine rain, when I peered intently a suggestion of the scenery sometimes showed itself, poised between visibility and invisibility. When puffs of wind stirred the pine and cypress branches, shaking clusters of water beads that fell on the stone slabs at my feet with a wondrous sound, I felt I was walking among "colonnades of trees draped with seven gems"<sup>7</sup>. An inexpressible feeling welled up within me.

### Listening to a Sūtra Lecture at Huang-tsang

The next day the rain stopped after breakfast, but the sky was gloomy and threatened to rain at any moment. However, being in a hurry to get underway, I dismissed all misgivings, took my leave of the young monk who had welcomed me so warmly and left Sacred Spring Monastery for Ching-fan Monastery in the town of Pai-t'u. Pai-t'u was about seven miles southeast of the Hsiao County seat. To the east large mountains stretched into the distance; to the west was the vast sweep of the great river. For several miles to the north and south lay level plains. In a time of peace it would have been a quiet and prosperous location. Ching-fan Monastery was built outside the south gate of Pai-t'u on a knoll profusely planted with pines and cypresses. A large ginkgo tree growing within the monastery formed a natural canopy over the front of the shrine hall, setting off the exquisite buildings in a way that made them unexpectedly imposing, tranquil and pleasant to the eye. At my home temple I had often heard the Venerable Ch'ing-yün, the younger brother of my master's master, speak of Ching-fan Monastery. He said that the retired abbot P'in-shan lived there, an ordination brother of old master Shu-t'ang, the deceased master of my master. Before I left for the South, the Venerable Ch'ing-yün took pains to instruct me: "When you go to Hsiao County, be sure to go to Pai-t'u and pay your respects to P'in-shan. While you're at it, you can rest your feet a bit there." However, all things can only be brought to completion under the right circumstances; otherwise, large and small matters alike will, in the end, come to nought. Why do I say this? Because P'in-shan, who never cared much for going out, had gone to another mountain half a day earlier to visit a friend. If that was not a coincidence, what is?

P'in-shan not being in, I was unwilling to idle about looking for something to do, so after eating lunch I hurried on to T'ien-men Monastery, which was only one mountain away from Huang-tsang Valley. I stayed overnight at T'ien-men and hurried to Jui-yün Monastery in Huang-tsang Valley the next morning. Huang-tsang Valley, otherwise known as Huang-sang Valley, was Hsiao County's only large public monastery. At the same time, it was the largest-scale Buddhist place of truth in the Hsü-chou area. Within several hundred miles of Hsü-chou its fame was great enough to compare with Kulin in Nanking and Pao-hua in Chu-jung. Surprisingly, the valley's renown completely eclipsed that of its own Jui-yün [Auspicious Cloud] Monastery, which had been the source of its fame in the first place. In the same way, many people know of Pao-hua Mountain but have not heard of Lung-ch'ang Monastery or Hui-chu Monastery.<sup>8</sup> If the reader will permit, I will say something of the state of things at Jui-yün Monastery.

Forgive me for not knowing the dynasty during which Jui-yün Monastery was built, but judging from the ancient objects of art on display there, its history extends back at least a thousand years. It sits at the mouth of Huang-tsang Valley, surrounded by strange boulders, grotesque crags and trees reaching up to the sky. This wild setting gave one the feeling that there was more to this monastery than met the eye. Its courtyards were divided into three enclosures, the layout being similar to that of T'ien-t'ung Monastery in Ningpo: entering the main gate, one climbed successively higher until reaching the dharma hall within the innermost entrance. There were plenty of trees and flowers in the courtyard, but they had not been well tended and were growing in uneven profusion, producing an effect that was jarring to the eye. The shrine hall, the dharma hall and the library had been massive, extraordinary structures but unfortunately eight years of war damage had aged and ruined their once splendid appearance. Nevertheless, I believe that in the hands of a good abbot the buildings can surely be restored to their original state.

At that time a lay devotee named Ch'en lived there. Some said that he had taken a *chü-jen* or provincial degree before the fall of the Manchu dynasty. He was quite learned and came from a rich family, but his wish was to live an ascetic life in a mountain monastery rather than return home and enjoy the pleasures of wealth. In the daytime he often held the *Diamond Sūtra* in both hands, sat on a large rock beside a spring and read aloud, rolling his head to the cadence of the prose. In the evening he expounded the sūtra to a few other devotees who also lived in the temple. He often became so excited that his hands waved about, his feet danced and flecks of spittle flew in all directions. During my stay at Jui-yün Monastery I went to listen every day. I was perplexed, but also quite interested, when he expounded such

lines as these: "The so-called Buddhadharma is not in fact the Buddhadharma: in this we have the Buddhadharma." "All forms are illusory. If one sees that all forms are not really forms, then one sees *Tathāgata*." Whether or not his explanations conformed to reality is a question my knowledge did not equip me to judge. This was because in my ten years since becoming a monk I had never attended a sūtra lecture; what is more, I had not even had the faintest idea that sūtras could be expounded! For this reason I have entitled this section "Listening to a Sūtra Lecture at Huang-tsang" to indicate how pitiful conditions were for young people who chose to become monks in those days.

Because my fellow acolyte Chen-shang served as the village agent for Jui-yün Monastery,<sup>9</sup> the establishment housed and fed me as a guest during my twenty-day stay at Huang-tsang Valley. Instead of attending devotions in the shrine hall or visiting the Buddha recitation hall, I went strolling at my leisure in the mountains after meals. I often climbed to the highest mountain thereabouts — Sheep Muzzle Mountain — and looked out over the valley scenery. Huang-tsang Valley is famous for the variety of its trees. Thus it is said that "all ethnic groups are found in Peking, and every species of tree is found in Huang-tsang Valley." Most amazing were the many old cedars, their trunks so thick it would take two persons to embrace them, which grew out of fissures in the rock. Such places had no soil and probably not much water, but the trees grew to such great size. Was this not a wondrous thing?

Along with the old cedars growing out of stone cracks, other trees contributed their colors to the beautiful scene. The mountains and valley were covered everywhere with yellow-leafed, red-leafed, green-leafed, and purple-leafed trees, as well as some that combined red with yellow or green with purple. Amidst this riot of colors, it was easy to forget how far along autumn really was, but "the sky was high and streams were running dry: frost was settling in the fields on all sides."

### My First Train Ride

The reader might wonder why, if my objective was to seek spiritual instruction in the South, I stayed twenty-some days at Huang-tsang Valley instead of continuing on my way after a day or two of rest. There were two reasons for this. First, I should explain that my true motive for going to Huang-tsang Valley was not that I felt drawn to its scenic surroundings or that I coveted the easy life there. Rather, I only hoped that my brother disciple Chen-sheng would put together some money for my travel expenses. However, on the day I arrived in Huang-tsang Valley, brother Chen-sheng

was collecting rents in a small village down in the valley called "Earth Basin." When I saw him and explained my purpose for coming he seemed very displeased, but on the strength of our relationship as brother disciples, he finally agreed to do what he could. Nevertheless, he said, "You'll have to wait at least a month." Why was this? He was not willing to say. Though I was as impatient to keep moving as an ant on a hot griddle, I had no choice but to settle down and wait. This was the first reason for my staying over twenty days at Huang-tsang Valley. The second reason was the problem of transportation, or perhaps one could call it the state of national affairs. A few days after my arrival at Huang-tsang Valley, news was released of the unconditional surrender of the Japanese in Nanking. By all rights the common people, after eight years of being trampled upon by the Japanese devils, should have been delirious with joy at this news, but in truth their feelings of unrest and panic were greater than before. Why was this? Because as soon as everyone heard that the Japanese devils had surrendered, they busied themselves with their own affairs. Guerilla resistance groups were no longer in evidence, and the Eighth Army irregulars, who had gotten their start robbing and looting, took advantage of this to move in. They disturbed local peace and order with acts of insane violence, sabotaging the North-South transportation lines and hampering the people's freedom of movement. It was like having a wolf sneak in the back door right after driving a thief away from the front.

Actually, Huang-tsang Valley was quite close to the Tientsin-Whangpoa railway: the Ts'ao Village station in south Hsü-chou was only five miles away. It seemed that if only one could board a train, there should not have been much difficulty in reaching Nanking 700 miles away. No one expected that a few days after the news of the Japanese surrender, the Eighth Army irregulars would sabotage the tracks south of Hsü-chou and north of Pang-fu, leaving them a total wreck. The Central Army worked night and day to make repairs, but whenever they left, the Eighth Route Army came out of hiding, like mice when the cat is away, and ruthlessly set to work pulling up the tracks. In places they even went so far as to level the roadbed. By the time the Central Army got word and hurried to the scene, they had disappeared like frightened rats.

Because of this, I bided my time and waited for twenty-odd days until the state of confrontation had cooled down a bit; then brother Chen-sheng accompanied me and Hai-hsiu to the Huang-shan-t'ou station. (Hai-hsiu was a disciple of my tonsure nephew<sup>10</sup> and had lived at Huang-tsang Valley for quite some time. Though he was a year younger than I, he had already taken his ordination vows and was proficient in the liturgy.) It was no easy matter, but my brother disciple succeeded in buying two third-class tickets to

Nanking. "Riding on this sort of train is mighty cold once it gets moving, but what could I do? There weren't any express tickets to buy," he sighed. He seemed ashamed to make us ride on such a train. But for the two of us, both strangers to the experience of riding a train, this was more than sufficient, especially considering the circumstances.

No sooner had Hai-hsiu and I climbed aboard the train than an ear-splitting blast from the steam whistle rang out, and the train shuddered forward. A clamorous wave of sound rose from the crowds on and off the train, calling up apprehension and bitterness as it dashed against each person's heart, for most of the passengers were cutting family ties and leaving their beloved to find a livelihood in a strange place. After the train left the station and the voices on the platform died away, the passengers took their places and quieted down. Hai-hsiu and I pulled quilts out of our bags and covered ourselves. Then, resting against our luggage and nestling together for warmth, we drew our necks into the collars of our quilted robes, closed our eyes and silently repeated the Buddha's name to the quickening rhythm of the piston rod. We felt none of the discomfort that brother Chen-sheng had predicted.

At that time the area north of Pang-fu was hit by floods. Although we rode on a night train, a vast sheet of water was visible in all directions under the bright moon. Many villages along the tracks were surrounded by water. Looking at this scene, I sadly thought, "They were already beset by the man-made calamity of war, and now, on top of that, comes a natural disaster. How can they go on living?" However, when the train stopped at Ku-jen-ch'iao, I saw vendors carrying lanterns in one hand and balancing trays of roasted chicken in the other as they ran back and forth alongside the passenger cars hawking their wares. I knew then that my concern for them was unnecessary. Nevertheless, I felt sorry for them: "Poor, pitiful people! The hardships you undergo stem mostly from the evil karma you created in the past. There are many ways to make a living: why must you make yours by seeking a fly's head of profit under the blade of a bloody knife?"

All thanks to that train! Running one night and half a day, it carried us safely from Huang-shan-t'ou to Ku-jen-ch'iao; from Ku-jen-ch'iao to Pang-fu; from Pang-fu to Ch'u-chou; and finally from Ch'u-chou to P'u-k'ou, which lay across the river from Nanking. After struggling off the crowded train we took a ferry and arrived at the Hsia-kuan district outside of Nanking's Yi-chiang Gate.



### First Days in Nanking

Hai-hsiu and I arrived at Hsia-kuan at around two o'clock in the afternoon. Suddenly seeing the maelstrom of activity before us, we were too bewildered to know what to do with ourselves, and could only walk back and forth on the dock. Hai-hsiu had come to Nanking several years ago on his way to be ordained at Ch'ing-liang Monastery in Ch'ang-chou. By all rights he should have been better at asking directions than I. Unfortunately he had always been the type of person who is unwilling to exchange pleasantries. Pressuring him to make conversation would have been tantamount to threatening his life. Although it was easier for me to start a conversation, I spoke with such a thick local accent that people either did not deign to notice me or snorted with contempt as they walked by. After several such encounters, I no longer had the courage to open my mouth.

Just then a fellow from Shantung walked up with a load of steamed buns for sale on his shoulders. I bought a few buns and asked him the road to Ku-lou. He said, "That's easy. Go through the Yi-chiang Gate and keep going along the same road. Don't make any turns. You'll get there within an hour." Then, looking at Hai-hsiu and me, he continued, "You have luggage. You'd better go by cart. It will only take ten or twenty minutes." When he heard he would get to ride on a cart, Hai-hsiu jumped for joy. Guided by the fellow from Shantung, we found a cart near the city gate, and before we got on he instructed, "You just sit and wait. When he has enough passengers, he'll leave. The fare to Ku-lou is fixed. Don't try to bargain with him, or you'll come out on the worse end." With that, before we had time to thank him, he shouldered his load and walked away with big strides, his head held proudly erect.

Why did we want to go to Ku-lou? When Hai-hsiu and I left Huang-tsang Valley, brother Chen-sheng had said, "When you two get to Nanking, you can go to Tung-yüeh Temple [Temple of the Eastern Peak]<sup>11</sup> on Pao-t'ai Street in the east part of Ku-lou. Look for the temple manager, Master Hsi-ch'u. He was a fellow student of mine at P'u-t'o Island,<sup>12</sup> and we lived in neighboring temples before he went to Nanking. When you get there just mention my name; he'll give you a good reception. At the same time, you'll be in a position to ask if they are ordaining monks at Pao-hua Mountain this year. If they are, you'll be in time for the winter session. If not, you can stay there and chant requiems<sup>13</sup> for a while. Then you can be ordained next year." So the first thing we did when we got off the cart in Ku-lou was ask the way to Tung-yüeh Temple. The driver curtly informed us that it was "behind the police station." I was about to ask the whereabouts of the police station when he lifted up his whip and was gone. Oh well. All I could



do was harden myself against embarrassment and ask questions of passers-by. I asked until I was blue in the face and, just as at Hsia-kuan, got nothing for my pains. In a burst of irritation, I turned to Hai-hsiu and said, "I'm not going to ask another person, even if we have to look for Tung-yüeh Temple all night." To my surprise, as soon as my outburst passed we found the temple without any further ado. Events in this world often work out in strange ways, do they not?

Tung-yüeh Temple was at the foot of the hill to the right and in front of the North Star Observatory. On the front it was bordered by the police station, to the rear was a small train station, and to the left was a detention center attached to the police station. On the right was a parking lot. The setting was as noisy as could be. The temple had two entrances and three shrine halls. The foremost hall had east and west rooms, each housing a large, lifelike horse statue. One of the horses was maroon-red and the other silver-white. Beside each was the statue of a ghostly boy groom. These horses were, it was said, in preparation for use by the Emperor of the Eastern Peak. The middle hall was devoted to an image of the Emperor of the Eastern Peak. The two wings were shrines to the ten kings of the underworld. In the hall proper were figures of infernal judges, the famous demons Cow's Head [*Niu-t'ou*] and Horse Face [*Ma-mien*], and ghosts who recorded the good and bad deeds of men — everything one could imagine was there. Seeing all of it one shivered even in the heat of summer.

The dense smoke of burning paper offerings and joss money rose from an incinerator in the courtyard before the middle hall and drifted outside, its acrid odor choking those who inhaled it. The central room of the rear shrine hall was in honor of the Buddha, and the left side was partitioned off into four or five rooms for resident monks. On the other side, next to the Buddha niche, was the Hall of Merit, and a little farther back was the Bedroom of the Queen of the Eastern Peak. There were always several shamanesses there shouting, jumping, crying, laughing and carrying on. It was not the most wholesome of places. Nevertheless, quite a few of my fellow monks were not above going inside to perform the "Buddhist rituals of their dreams." Indeed, they were to be admired for their altruistic spirit, for they followed the dictum: "If I descend not into hell, who shall make that descent?"

When Hai-hsiu and I arrived, the temple manager Master Hsi-ch'u and the monks who specialized in performing Buddhist services on request had just finished supper and gone out. Only the lay workman was left to watch the premises. When he heard that we were the temple manager's countrymen, he grabbed our luggage and showed us to a guest room to the left side of the rear shrine hall. Then he brought a basin of water, brewed a pot of tea and

asked if we had eaten supper. In order to save him trouble we said we had already eaten. We exchanged a few words, and he returned to the front courtyard. Only then did I shut the door, take out the steamed buns I had bought on the wharf and divide them between Hai-hsiu and myself.

After ten o'clock, the monks who had gone out to perform services came back one after another. We struck up a conversation and found that they were all northerners, and extraordinarily friendly at that. They immediately gathered around us and inquired into the situation up north. Just when everyone was chatting enthusiastically, a fortyish monk with large eyes and beetling brows, holding a white porcelain teapot with a red floral pattern, strode into the room with deliberate pigeon-toed steps. A fellow monk hastened to introduce him, saying, "This is our temple manager." Hai-hsiu and I touched our foreheads to the ground at his feet, got up, and informed him that we had come to meet him at the suggestion of brother Chen-sheng. With lips tightly pursed, he silently ran his eyes over our faces. When he had looked us over to his satisfaction, he rested his gaze on the twelve large, round ordination scars<sup>14</sup> on the top of Hai-hsiu's head and, pointing at him, asked in a coarse voice:

"What relation are you to Chen-sheng?"

"A grandson-disciple," Hai-hsiu answered.

"How many years since you renounced lay life?"

"Nineteen years."

"Nineteen years? How old are you now?"

"Twenty-three years old."

"You left home when you were only four?"

"Yes."

"Where were you ordained?"

"At Ch'ing-liang Monastery in Chang-chou."

"Can you chant and recite well?"

"Well enough to get by."

"Well enough to get by," he repeated.

Then he looked Hai-hsiu over some more and, with the air of someone who has made up his mind, said, "When you get back from taking your young grandfather-master [meaning the author] to Pao-hua Mountain, you'll stay here and help out, all right?" Without waiting to find out whether Hai-hsiu agreed with this, he made his rocking, pigeon-toed way to the front. Looking at his gait, which verged on the ludicrous, I was an inch away from laughing aloud. When he was gone, a few of our fellows said, "'Little Top' is bull-headed, but he is a nice person." After chatting a while, we went to

our rooms.

Before we turned in, I asked Hai-hsiu, "They said 'Little Top' is bull-headed. What does 'Little Top' mean? Did you understand them? 'Little Top' means temple manager. Isn't the top part of the first character in the word 'manager' [*tang-chia*] just like the character 'little'?" he answered in an amused whisper. "When I lived at Huang-tsang Valley, people who had been in Nanking often told me that if you want to stay in Nanking and chant requiems, you must first learn some of the jargon used by monks who specialize in that line. Otherwise, everyone will call you 'turnip head.' 'Little top' is one of those expressions. I knew that years ago." Hearing Hai-hsiu say this, I could not suppress a mute laugh. I thought to myself: "Oh no! I have risked my life to travel the great distance to Nanking. Here I am on my first day, learning a slang expression used by funerary monks. Don't tell me I am fated to chant requiems for a living?"

The night passed uneventfully, and we got up for breakfast in the morning. The resident monks went out again to perform Buddhist services. The temple manager invited us to his room for a talk; he hospitably ordered a servant to serve two covered bowls of tea and bring out four bowls of fruit. The three of us sat around a square table set up against the wall and talked, first of common friends at the neighboring temples in our home district, then about traditions at the large public monasteries in the South, and then about such things as the origins and history of Tung-yüeh Temple. The upshot of the conversation was that Hai-hsiu would take me to Pao-hua Mountain and then return to Tung-yüeh Temple to give them help. The manager also expressed his hope that I would return to his temple after my ordination to make some "clothes money" [*yi-tan ch'ien*]. I merely smiled, without indicating my assent or refusal. Then Hai-hsiu and I went out to do some shopping.

A month had passed since the Japanese surrender, but Nanking had not yet recovered its vitality. The area north of Pao-t'ai Street was especially bad — so desolate that it was no different from a rural village. Hai-hsiu and I strolled around the Ku-lou [Drum Tower] area. Storytellers and jugglers were calling for all they were worth to attract audiences, but no one went to hear their stories or watch their tricks. "This desolation and silence is one of the main reasons the Chinese people hate the Japanese," I said softly to Hai-hsiu. "I feel the same way," he replied. We finished our shopping and returned to Tung-yüeh Temple. Then we went on another excursion to the mountain where North Star Observatory had been, and to Chi-ming [Cock's Crow] Monastery. After all that it was time for lunch. After lunch we took our leave of the temple manager and took a small train to Hsia-kuan, our plan being to transfer to the Nanking-Shanghai train and proceed to the

town of Lung-t'an in Chü-jung County.

When we got off the train at Hsia-kuan, we saw a monk in his twenties holding a tiny wicker basket and pacing back and forth. He seemed to be quite upset about something. Seeing us, he joined his hands before his chest and asked, "Are you gentlemen headed for Pao-hua Mountain?" We nodded as we walked by him to the ticket booth, where Hai-hsiu watched the luggage while I plunged into the crowd to buy tickets to Lung-t'an. When I returned with the tickets, the stranger was attempting to strike up a conversation with Hai-hsiu, who just stood and listened without answering.

"Are you going to Pao-hua Mountain too?" I asked.

"Yes." Then, like a string of firecrackers, his words came out one after another without pause: "I am from Nan-ch'ang in Kiangsi. When I got off the boat this morning, I ran straight here from the dock to buy a ticket to Lung-t'an. There were too many people buying tickets, and I was carrying this wicker basket in one hand and a large bundle in the other, so every time I tried to squeeze through the crowd I got pushed away from the ticket booth. Just when I didn't know where to turn, a monk suddenly appeared out of the mass of people. He was about thirty. He asked me very cordially if I were going to Pao-hua Mountain to be ordained. I said I was. He was very pleased and said, 'That's wonderful! I'm going there too. I had a friend take my luggage with him this morning. I went to see a fellow from my home district; that's why I didn't get here until now. I was feeling bad about not having anyone to take the trip with. Heh heh, there is truly an affinity from former lives between us!' He showed me a ticket to Lung-t'an and kindly offered to buy one for me. How could I impose on him to push through that crowd to buy me a ticket? Instead I asked him to watch my bundle while I went to buy a ticket, carrying this basket. When I came back, the man was gone, and so was my luggage! I thought maybe he had gone ahead to the turnstile to get in line, but there was no sign of him there either. I've been looking all over, but I can't find a trace of him. I'm only carrying small change. The money for my ordination fee and return fare is sewn inside my quilt, so if I can't find that bundle, not only will my ordination be impossible, but even my trip home will be a problem. What should I do? I'm so worried I'm about to go crazy." Tears welled up and rolled down his cheeks; he had all he could do to keep from sobbing out loud. Seeing the state he was in, I felt terrible for him. To myself I thought, "Could it be that he was tricked in broad daylight in this city that has been a center of civilization for centuries?"

Even the normally taciturn Hai-hsiu chipped in: "No way you'll ever get your luggage back. That guy was a *ma-liu-tzu*."

"*Ma-liu-tzu*?" That was a novel term as far as I was concerned. Our

fellow monk, too, stared at Hai-hsiu in an uncomprehending daze.

"What, then, is a *ma-liu-tzu*?" I asked.

He explained, "*Ma-liu-tzu* are con-artists, but their abilities go far beyond your ordinary con artist. They can tell what you're worth and whether you're an easy mark just by looking at you and hearing you talk. They change their tactics to fit every situation, like a helmsman who turns the tiller to suit the changing wind. They can dress up like monks or change into Taoist priests. They cry and laugh at will. They know jargon from all walks of life and can speak any dialect. They hang around at train stations and docks — any place there are lots of people. When they discover their prey, they latch onto it and don't let it out of sight. When the time is right, they set their schemes in motion and, easy as a snap, the game is theirs." He continued, "The year I went to be ordained at Ch'ing-liang Monastery in Ch'ang-chou, two of my ordination brothers were swindled out of their luggage. I have heard they are especially numerous in Nanking and Shanghai. How could you be so careless?"

When I heard Hai-hsiu say this, something occurred to me. I gave him a meaningful look, picked up my luggage and walked away. He followed along, bewildered. Only when we had reached the turnstile did I put down my bag and say, "Hearing what you just said reminded me of what the head monk of a small temple in Hsiao County once said to me: 'There's nothing stamped on your forehead that shows whether you're a good man or a bad one.' Now he says his luggage was taken. Neither you nor I saw it happen. Who can guarantee he isn't a *ma-liu-tzu* himself? As the saying goes, 'Never think of harming others, but always think of how to guard against them.' We'd better stick to our own affairs. Actually, we're having enough trouble taking care of ourselves. We couldn't help him, even if we did get involved. Let's be on our way and forget about it!" Hai-hsiu did not seem to be in favor of my view, but he kept his thoughts to himself and followed me onto the train.

## NOTES

1. *Kua-tzu* means literally "guy with a brogue" and is used as a derogatory term for Northerners.