

A Buddhist Teaching on Not Fighting

By Rev. Heng Sure

My Buddhist teacher in religion, the Venerable Abbot Hsuan Hua, appreciated Interfaith dialogue. I'd like to share a story from the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, our mountain monastery in Northern California, to illustrate Master Hua's vision of Interfaith, Buddhist style. The first criterion for genuine Buddhist practice: no fighting.

The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas' second Interfaith Conference brought together representatives from the Ukiah Valley's religious communities for a weekend in 1987.

I was in the administration office half an hour before we began our first morning session when the phone rang. It was the monk patrolling the front gate. "Call the Venerable Abbot, quick. We've got a demonstration outside."

"Demonstrators?" the Abbot said.

"Yes, Master," I said. "Shall I call the police?"

"I don't think any of you know what I mean by not fighting. I'll be right down."

The demonstrators, holding signs inscribed in crayon, "The Lord knows what you do is a lie," and "Sinners fall to hell," walked in a circle just off the property line. The tallest of them had a black beard and a rope belt holding up grimy khakis; he towered a foot above the Abbot. The Abbot walked up to the tallest demonstrator, craned back and stared into his face. The group stopped walking and stood silently.

The Abbot said in a loud voice, "I welcome you to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. You've come at just the right time. We have many religions represented here today. But there's no need for you to work so hard out here in the sun. I invite you in to demonstrate inside. If you want something to drink we have soda and tea. We have vegetarian food if you are hungry from your hard work. We have beds; you can demonstrate lying down if you'd prefer."

He tugged on the sleeve of the bearded demonstra-



The Founder of the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua.

tor. The Abbot was so earnest and disarming that the tall man, despite himself, giggled. Then he recovered his fierce face and pulled away. The Abbot stepped forward and leaned close to the bearded man. With a smile he said, "Why can I say this? Because I have Jesus' true spirit of love and self-sacrifice in my heart. I'm not your enemy, I'm your friend."

The sound of picket signs dropping to the ground behind the backs of demonstrators echoed in the morning air.

The leader gestured to the group to gather by their cars. Without a word they left. Two hours later the door to the conference room opened and in walked five demonstrators, with combed hair, and wearing clean shirts. They sat down and objected to everything that was said; but waited their turn to speak and objected politely. They stayed throughout the day, steadfastly in opposition to our attempts to find common ground, but listening. They shook hands in the end all around and traded phone numbers.

Afterwards, a Baptist minister said, "This was unprecedented. They actually listened to another point of view. Every church in the Valley, especially the Christians, has had trouble with that group. This may be the first time anybody has taken them seriously, engaged them, or treated them with kindness."

"That's what we mean by 'not fighting'," said the Abbot, "I don't just talk it, I actually practice it." ▲

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