

## *Letters to the Sixth Patriarch*

by MILTON MOON

Hui-neng the illiterate, some called him.  
Born in the thirty-eighth year of the seventh century  
he went to the Other Shore in the thirteenth year  
of the following. Little is known about his background  
except that his father was banished for some offence  
during which he died and his wife and son suffered punishment  
because the mother needed her son to gather  
firewood to sell to supplement their income.

Legends abound how Buddhism reached China  
in the first Century of the Christian era.  
Buddhism itself developed separate paths, but  
Hinayana Buddhism spread it's teachings into Ceylon and  
South-East Asia in Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Bali.  
Mahayana Buddhism spread through India to Nepal, but  
also Kashmir, Tibet, and Turkestan into Chinese Mongolia, as well as Korea  
and Japan where it existed with the native Shinto.

During the Fourth Century, many Buddhist Scriptures had been  
translated into Chinese and neither Taoism or Confucianism  
seemingly raised objections regarding the Dhyani Buddhas of Contemplation .  
One Buddha appealed in China and this was Amitabha Buddha of Immeasurable Light  
reposing in his beautiful Paradise of the Western Quarter of the Cosmos.  
The historical Buddha, Gautama, was revered as Lord of the Sakya clan  
but it was Amitabha's Western Paradise that had appeal in his  
distant Nirvana. More than that, surprisingly, it was Avalokitsevara  
(Avalokita) in Amitabha's bodhisattva stage that had the greatest appeal  
for personal devotion in the saying of *O-mi-t'o Fo* and awakening faith.

### *Imagined Letters from a Mother to her Son*

O-mi-t'o Fo, O-mi-t'o Fo!  
My son you'll never read these thoughts  
even though I can write them, but you can't read....  
after your day's labour you were too tired to learn.  
All you could manage was to eat and soak in a hot tub,  
then sleep, to get your strength for the next day's labour.  
Often you would fall asleep in the bath. It was for you I prayed,  
O-mi-t'o Fo, O-mi-t'o.

These, my thoughts, are my prayers really.  
I am guilty that you worked as long and hard as you did -  
your father would be proud of you looking after me.  
And when he died he would know you would continue.  
Over the long years, he and I would talk together - we still do -  
it was our way of keeping us together and the family alive.  
I pray a lot to Avalokita to have the strength he had,  
to achieve what he achieved. O-mi-t'o Fo, O-mi-t'o Fo.

You did one thing - many things in fact - in your work as

a wood cutter and wood gatherer. You learnt, in the silence, about your Mind, and thinking. I too have spent a lot of time suffering in silence and I too learnt about the value of silence. I learnt about survival - of not giving in to hatred - or bitterness, especially when your father died. I decided then I would keep him alive in my heart, and in my Mind. The Mind I talk about is very deep - as deep as the Mind of Ta Mo facing the wall at Shao Lin temple. O-mi-t'o Fo is my wall. O-mi-t'o Fo, O-mi-t'o Fo.

There is lot to learn about the Pure Land, as much as Ch'an and the difference between the meditation schools. You have the North and the South schools and gradual and sudden stages of enlightenment. Don't be surprised at what a stupid woman knows - I hear a lot and think a lot. In discussing these things with your father it was if he was counselling and guiding me. Ta Mo faced the wall for nine years but it was his Mind he was facing. I think the Pure Land and the Western Paradise is also the Mind - both can delude you...I wonder, I wonder. O-mi-t'o Fo, O-mi-t'o Fo.

The Pure Land is not Ta Mo's wall in the Shao Lin temple; it is in the Western part of the Cosmos. The other difference is the Pure Land Way is the Way of Faith as against Faith in Self. There are many similarities as both Ways are the Buddha's Way, the way of Sakyamuni and the way of Amitabha, O-mi-t'o Fo, who is aided by Avalokita and K'wan yin, the goddess of mercy and the power of the inevitable Law of Karma. What we have thought is what we are, but the Pure Land can alter you. If you truly repent - truly repent, with no misgivings, no backward glances; but it may take many many kalpas. O-mi-t'o Fo, O-mi-t'o Fo.

Forgive me son if you ever read this, but what I want to say is already known to you. You are aware that Ta Mo faced the wall at Shao Lin for nine years and many others would do the same but how many would do it properly? Self delusion is easy, as Dharmakara found, because it took kalpas for him to become Amitabha, so how long would it take others? The end of your path is 'enlightenment' (and it is not the end but the beginning); how many backslide and corrupt their attainment. To acclaim achievement is bad enough - and it should be kept a secret; even from yourself- but to corrupt it is a crime against yourself. O-mi-t'o Fo, O-mi-t'o Fo.

Everything has its own time and reason. It is time for you to face the wall, to struggle with your Mind, as I have with mine. It is world that much is wrong with its values. Ta Mo in his nine years of struggle was an inspiration to me, as was Avalokita, as was K'wan yin. I no longer argue with anyone or compete with anyone who knows more than me. I, with your father, am grateful even though there is much to regret if we compare our lives with some others. Comparisons and regrets are the seeds of Karma. Just don't ever forget—whether it is enlightenment or the Pure Land you hope to achieve—that it is not what you aim for, but what you are...O-mi-t'o Fo, O-mi-t'o Fo O-mi-t'o Fo, O-mi-t'o Fo, O-mi-t'o Fo.