The Practice of Making Prostrations in Spiritual Maturation

Rev. Heng Sure
What is bowing?

bowing is a ritual gesture that shows respect externally and internally humbles the one who bows.
The Sutra on Bowing:

“Bowing in respect purges the obstacle of arrogance, inspires faith and reverence, and increases one’s roots of goodness.”
Why Do Buddhists Bow?

- bowing transforms pride and arrogance
- bowing teaches respect
- bowing increases goodness in the heart and in the world
The Chinese view of bowing

A spirit

Worshipping at an altar
Why Do Other People Bow?

- Socially, for courtesy, to show honor and to repay being honored.
- To continue power relationships.
- To greet, and to send off.
- Spiritually, to respect the divine.
- And to cultivate the body and mind.
Greetings:

East to West

West to East
Welcome!
Goodbye!
People bow to show power relationships

Lower to higher

Equals
Defeated kings bow

King Jehu of Israel paying tribute and bowing to the dust before King Shalmaneser III, who is making a libation to his god. (832 BCE)
Who bows?

- All classes of people bow
- Religious people bow
- Catholics bow
- Muslims and Jews bow
- Protestants bow
- Hindus bow
- Even polar bears and elephants bow
Kinds of Catholic bows

Bow
Genuflect
Prostration

Prostration
More Catholic bows:
Palms up
Sign of the Cross
Kinds of Buddhist Bows:

- Full bows 頂禮，禮拜
- Half bows 問訊
- Palms together 合掌，合十
- Kneeling 長跪
Islamic Bowing
Jewish Bowing
Protestant Bowing:
Hindu Bowing
Many Kinds of Bows:
Rev. Heng Sure undertook a bowing pilgrimage in 1977. Traveling up the coast of California, 800 miles, seeking for world peace. (It’s external success might be measured by a look at how (un)peaceful the world is at present.)
I realized that the only way to change the world was to change myself; that outer change could result only from inner change.

Confucius: Subdue yourself and return to propriety.

Gandhi: Become the change you wish to see in the world.

The Buddha: Practice what you preach.
Inspirations for my pilgrimage:

Great Master Xu Yun
Bhikshu Heng Ju

Three Steps, One Bow

BY BHIKSHU HUNG JU
AND BHIKSHU HUNG YO

Two American Buddhist monks' own story of their extraordinary 1100-mile journey for world peace.

at Master Xu Bhikshu Heng Ju
Bowing Route

South Pasadena to Santa Monica

North on Hiway 1 to Ukiah

a distance of 800 miles over two years and six months
Benefits:

- Learned to like the daily bowing
- Chance to really change my speech karma
- Wanted to repay my parents’ kindness by learning to be a better person
- Chance to watch my mind’s habits
- Help bring the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas into being.
Results:

- I recognize my bad habits more clearly
- Don’t talk casually as before
- Have a better relationship with my parents
- Recognize the power of bowing to level out pride and create goodness
- Recognize more people as family
As a novice monk, I began bowing to the Avatamsaka Sutra at Gold Mountain Monastery.
Prof. Verhoeven, (Bhikshu Heng Ch’au) vowed to accompany me.
First bows at Gold Wheel Monastery, 1997
We slept in a four-wheeled Monastery: the Dragon Car, a 1957 Plymouth Station Wagon
Ven. Master Hua kept us safe at all times.
Daily practices:

- Bowing, sitting, chanting, translating, tai chi
- Silence
- Journal writing
- Repenting and cleaning out
- Watching the *Avatamsaka Sutra* come alive
Master Hua’s instructions:

“Bow to an empty space Buddha; bow to a Dharma Realm Buddha”

“You (your ego) will disappear by bowing to all the Buddhas of the past, present and future.”
“Bow until motion and stillness are one.”
動靜一如
Bowing Contemplation:

The worshipper and the worshipped by nature, are empty and still,

The Way and the Response intertwine in ways hard to conceive of.

My body is like a precious pearl, and

The image of (name) appears within
My body appears there, before (name)

With my head to his feet, I offer up my life, take refuge and bow down.
News From True Cultivators: Letters to the Venerable Abbot Hua

Available at: www.bttsOnline.org
Dedication of Merit

May every living being,
Our minds as one and radiant with light,
Share the fruits of peace,
With hearts of goodness, luminous and bright.
If people hear and see,
How hands and hearts can find in giving, unity,
May their minds awake,
To Great Compassion, wisdom and to joy.
May kindness find reward,
May all who sorrow leave their grief and pain;
May this boundless light,
Break the darkness of their endless night.
Because our hearts are one
This world of pain turns into Paradise
May all become compassionate and wise,
May all become compassionate and wise.