

臺灣探獄之我思

Reflections on Visiting Prisons in Taiwan

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學人非常幸運，能參加2006年亞洲訪問團；在無數的美好經驗中，最難忘、最震撼的，就是陪法師們去參觀臺灣花蓮的三所監獄。兩天行程中，造訪花蓮看守所、花蓮外役監獄和花蓮監獄。

法界佛教總會與花蓮監獄建立關係，始於廿多年前，當時李志宏師兄請問宣公上人，是否可把正法傳入監獄，來幫助獄中的同學們；上人回答：「哪裡有苦的地方，我們就去那裡！」

這項指示，種下了法總法師們去監獄弘法的種子。自此，李師兄毫不疲憊地進出獄門，本著上人慈悲之教化，屢屢點燃同學們心中希望之光與鼓舞之熱。（按：稱受刑人為「同學」因以鼓勵他們學習人生的新道路、具有新技術，成為未來有生產力的社會人士。）

限於探獄人數的規定，訪問團只能有25位團員前往；有位法師說我可以去時，我真感激。一方面，當法師們在獄中轉法輪時，我要做護法；另一方面，我在溫室中長大，總被父母保護在世間險惡之外。我唯一見過的監獄，是在電視上，所以有點畏懼，因為我毫無所知監獄裡會是什麼光景。

可是當晚在懺悔時，突然地，我看見了地藏菩薩出現在我心裡。我立即覺得很慚愧，心想：「地藏菩薩進入地獄的最深淵，去救脫無量無邊苦，而且發願：『地獄不空，誓不成佛』；而我這兒，卻害怕著陪法師去探訪監獄，我算什麼佛弟子？」醒悟後，向觀音菩薩求勇氣；不可思議地，我的恐懼竟然化為法喜，因為我領會到以開放的胸懷來面對將要上的課程。

I was fortunate enough to join a portion of the 2006 Delegation to Asia. Of all the myriad of wonderful experiences, the most memorable and powerful one was accompanying the Dharma Masters to visit three prisons in Hualien, Taiwan. Over a period of two days, we went to a detention center, a minimum security prison, and a maximum security prison.

The relationship between DRBA and Hualien prisons started more than 20 years ago when one of our Dharma brothers, Lee Zhi Hong, consulted the Venerable Master Hua about bringing the Proper Dharma into the prisons to help the inmates there. The Venerable Master replied, "Wherever there is suffering, it is the place we should go."

This reply planted the seed for propagating the Buddhadharma in prisons, by DRBA's Dharma Masters. Since then, Mr. Lee has been working tirelessly with the classmates in the prisons, bringing them hope and encouragement through the Venerable Master's wise and compassionate teachings. (Note: the inmates are referred to as "classmates" because they are encouraged to learn a new way of life and acquire new skills so they can be productive members of the society).

Due to the logistics of visiting a prison, only twenty-five members of the delegation could go. When a Dharma Master said that I could go, I was apprehensive. On the one hand, I wanted to be a good Dharma protector and support the Dharma Masters as they turn the Dharma Wheel for the classmates in jail. On the other hand, I grew up in a greenhouse, constantly sheltered from the evils of the world by my parents. The only jail I had ever seen was on T.V. I was scared, because I had no reference point for what going inside a jail would be like.

However, when I was repenting that evening, all of a sudden I saw Earth Store Bodhisattva in my mind's eye. Instantly, I was deeply ashamed. I thought, "Earth Store Bodhisattva goes into the deepest of hells to relieve inconceivable suffering and has vowed



我們首先拜訪的監獄，是花蓮看守所。走過會客室，佩槍的守衛打開了第一道鐵門，大家魚貫地擠進兩道鐵門之間；在第二道鐵門打開之前，我們後面的第一道門必須要再度鎖上，這時，襲來一股強烈的體臭和糞便氣味。當我們從一道上鎖的鐵門到另一道時，《地藏經》中的偈頌不斷湧上我的腦海。最後我們走到第六道門，等那扇堅實的鐵門打開時，我們走入一個庭院；迎接我們的，是完全出乎意料之外的、同學們所念誦的地藏菩薩聖號。他們的聲音是如此強勁、熱切和莊嚴，我感覺震盪在這石壁庭院中的唱誦，似乎打通了我心中一些關閉之門，眼淚不覺滑落面頰。頓時我感受到：念誦佛號乃至一聲，可救脫地獄之苦；諸佛菩薩的無量光——那一線希望與慈悲的光明，是如何燦破眾生漫漫長夜的黯淡。

我也體會到我們何其幸運，能有善知識引導與善友提攜，在良好的環境中學習佛法；不至於在打開心扉聆聽佛的教法之前，就因誤入歧途而導致坐監。

走入看守所的小佛堂時，當天我的第二個驚訝來了。我驚訝於這些同學和你我長相一樣、言語相似，步伐無異；唯一不同的，是他們必須穿制服。未學佛法前，我的主觀、論斷很強；現在我略有改善，因為我從上人那兒學到迴光返照。我現在想的是導致他們淪入獄中的因緣，而非責怪或批評他們所犯的罪。假如我爸是個毒蟲、我媽是個酒徒，而且我從不知下一餐哪裡可得，會不會我最終也入獄了？與一些同學的經歷成強烈對比，我的父母放棄他們在祖國——臺灣的一切，移民到美國，就為兩個小女兒能有較好的機會；因此我豈能以自己無知的驕慢，去論斷這些同學？

當我觀察同學們如何接受法師們慈悲、激勵的言語時，我對自己父母的感恩也多面性的增加。無論我們是在看守所、外役監獄或花蓮監獄，我覺得有些同學視法師如同慈母悲父般。有時，瞭解到某人對你真心的關懷與信任，往往就可轉境為善了。我聽著法語時，真的很感謝父母帶我親近三寶。沒有這二位善知識，我會仍然在苦海中盲目掙扎。感謝這些與同學相處而習得之

not to be a Buddha until the hells are empty. Here I am, being afraid to accompany the Dharma Masters to visit the jails. What kind of disciple of the Buddha am I?" After realizing this and praying to Guanyin Bodhisattva for courage, amazingly my fear turned into Dharma joy, for I learned to open my mind to the lessons that I was about to receive.

The first prison we visited was a Detention Center. After going through the reception area, armed prison guards unlocked the first iron gate. We then squeezed into the space between the first and second iron gates. The first iron gate had to be relocked behind us before the second iron gate was unlocked. Meanwhile, we were assailed by strong odors of unwashed bodies and human waste. As we went from one locked gate to the next, verses from *Earth Store Sutra* kept on popping into my head. Finally we reached the sixth gate, and when that solid iron gate was opened, we walked into a courtyard and were greeted by the totally unexpected sound of the classmates chanting Earth Store Bodhisattva's name. Their voices were strong, earnest and majestic; I felt the chants resonating around the stone courtyard. They somehow opened some locked doors in my heart, and tears started to roll down my face. At that instant, I had a glimpse of how reciting a Buddha's name even once can relieve the suffering in hell; and how the infinite light of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, a light of hope and compassion, can break the darkness of living beings' endless nights.

I also realized how lucky we are to be able to study the Buddhadharma in pleasant environments with good teachers to guide us and supportive Dharma friends to help us, instead of having to wait until we take so many wrong turns that we end up in jail before we can open our hearts to the Buddha's teaching.

As we entered the small Buddha Hall in the Detention Center, I had my second surprise of the day. I was amazed to see that the classmates look just like you and me, talk just like you and me, and walk just like you and me. The only distinguishing feature was that the classmates had to wear uniforms. Before I started to study the Buddhadharma, I was very opinionated and judgmental. Now I've improved a little bit because I have learned from the Venerable Master Hua to return the light and examine my own mind. Instead of blaming and judging the classmates for the crimes they had committed, I now wondered what circumstances had caused them to end up in jail. If my Dad were a drug addict and my Mom an alcoholic, and if I never knew where my next meal was coming from, would I end up in jail, too? In sharp contrast to some of the classmates' experiences, my parents gave up everything they had in their homeland, Taiwan, and immigrated to the States so their two young daughters could

教訓；我發願盡我所能地來幫助生生世世的父母，往生西方極樂世界，以此方式來報答他們全部的慈愛。真不可思議啊！探訪一所監獄，對人竟能有如此的激發！

行程的第二天，我們前往花蓮監獄，因為有73位同學想皈依三寶。儀式就要開始前，一小撮觀禮的同學也決定皈依三寶；一位團員表示皈依者將近百位。當我們全體居士團員觀禮時，都法喜充滿。還記得那時有一位法師講法時指出，倘若有人行一善行，就能感動身邊的人也行善；同樣地如果做一惡事，我們也能把人帶壞去行惡。當天我們真的經驗到：一撮人所行的善行，是如何地鼓舞了他人也同樣去行善！

當皈依儀式進行到懺悔的部分時，我見很多同學唱誦懺悔偈時哭泣。在我也陪著哭時，上人「一切唯心造」的教言浮現腦海。我認為同學們的淚水如法雨，沖掉了他們自性、佛性上覆蓋的層層塵垢。雖然這些同學仍陷囹圄，我相信他們心靈已獲自由；我也提醒自己：正因我身非陷囹圄，不可以塵勞煩惱拘禁自心。

探獄後數日，當旁人告訴我：我們所拜訪的花蓮監獄，女監已正式改名為「蓮花精舍」，而男監則稱「覺非精舍」；我對「佛法能改善人生」的信念，再次得到肯定。這好消息，令我憶起上人的另一個教導：「不論你有什麼過錯，若能改，前途還是有光明的。」但願佛法之光耀引導我們都返本還原！

have better opportunities. So how can I possibly judge the classmates using my ignorant arrogance?

My gratitude toward my parents increased manifold as I observed how the classmates reacted to the Dharma Masters' kind and encouraging words. It didn't matter whether we were in a Detention Center, a minimum security prison, or a maximum security prison, I felt that some of the classmates were regarding the Dharma Masters as incredibly caring and kind parents. Sometimes all it takes to turn towards goodness is knowing that somebody truly cares and believes in you. As I listened to the Dharma talks, I was so grateful that my parents had brought me near the Triple Jewel. Without them, I would still be struggling blindly in the sea of suffering. Thanks to the lessons I was learning by being with the classmates, I resolved to do all I can to help my parents from all my past lives, to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, as a way to repay their kindness. It is amazing what visiting a prison can inspire a person to do!

On the second day of our visit, we went to a maximum security prison because seventy-three of the classmates there wished to take refuge with the Triple Jewel. Shortly before the Dharma assembly started, a small group of classmates from the audience also decided to take refuge with the Triple Jewel. According to one of the delegation members, there were over ninety people who took refuge. We lay delegation members were full of Dharma joy as we watched the classmates participate in the ceremony. I recall that in one Dharma talk, a Dharma Master pointed out how if we do one good deed, we can influence the people around us to also do good deeds. Similarly, if we do one bad deed, we can also influence the people around us to do bad deeds. On that day, we surely were experiencing how the good deed of a group of people can inspire others to do the same.

As the refuge ceremony reached the repentance section, I saw many classmates crying as they recited the repentance verses. As I cried along with them, the Venerable Master's teaching of "everything is created by the mind alone" popped into my head. I thought the classmates' tears were like the Dharma rain washing away the layers of dirt covering their self-nature, their Buddha nature. Although physically these classmates are still in prison, I believe that their minds have been freed. I also reminded myself that just because I am not physically in jail, I should not imprison my own mind with all my afflictions.

Several days after our visit, my belief in the life-changing ability of the Dharma was confirmed once more when I was told that in the maximum security prison that we visited, the female classmates had changed the name of their wing to "Lotus Vihara," and the male classmates had changed the name of their wing to "Realizing Past Faults Vihara." This good news brought another of the Venerable Master's teachings to mind, "Whatever your past mistakes, if you are able to change, your future can still be bright." May the radiant light of the Dharma guide all of us back to our self-nature!