

我的法緣

My Dharma Affinities

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我出生在台灣，今年三十歲，在我十歲的時候全家移民到美國。那一年有一位來到美國後才認識的家庭朋友，她是上人的徒弟，告訴母親有關萬佛聖城的一些事情，還說金輪寺有巴士從洛杉磯直達萬佛城。那時我們剛來美國不久，沒有親戚也沒有朋友，不曾到過任何地方；母親聽到有關金輪寺的巴士，她想這是一件很好的事，可以帶我和兩個姐姐出門，我們就有一個低消費的家庭旅遊。所以在1988年的冬天是我第一次到萬佛城，也是我們在美國過的第一個新年。當時並不知道以後我還有更多的新年會在萬佛城度過。

那時我們家還沒學佛，那位家庭朋友給母親很多上人的開示及佛經淺釋，因此當我對宗教有興趣時，決定先從佛教開始。心想等學完佛教以後，再一一的去研究其他宗教，看那一個宗教講得比較有道理。當時並不知道佛法是如此的浩瀚深奧，至今我還沒有機會去研究第二個宗教。

當我十三歲時告訴母親想要吃素，她不反對。我吃素後大姐也跟著吃，幾年後父親和二姐也



張簡嘉乃(右一)與其家人

Amy Chang-Chien (first on the right) and her family

吃素了，直到最近我才知道有個吃素的家庭是多麼的幸運！由於DRBY(法界佛教青年會)認識許多朋友，他們也吃素，但是家人並不支持他們。我對這些法友很是敬佩，因為當處在一個別人（尤其是最親近的家人）不支持的環境下，要保持你的信仰是需要非常大的毅力和決心。在此我要感謝我的家人，尤其是母親需要長年克服親戚們的反對，而讓我們吃素。

我有一個很快樂的童年，也過了一個很平凡而忙碌的學生生活，從來不知道受苦是什麼？而我的朋友也都有美好的家庭，也不知道受苦是什麼？以前所學的佛法——四聖諦、八正道、菩薩

I was born in Taiwan. I am thirty years old. At age ten, my family immigrated to the United States. That same year a family friend, who is a disciple of the Venerable Master, told my mom about the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas (CTTB) and that there was a bus going up from the Gold Wheel Monastery in Los Angeles to CTTB. We were new in the United States and had no relatives and very few friends. For the most part we didn't get to go anywhere. When my mom heard about the Gold Wheel bus, she thought it would be a good idea to take me and my sisters on this bus ride as a kind of cheap family vacation. So that was my first time at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, in the winter of 1988. We spent our first New Years in America at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. Little did I know that I would be spending many more New Years at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, but not until a few years later.

At that time my family wasn't Buddhist yet. The family friend who told us about the CTTB bus gave my mom many books by the Venerable Master. When I became interested in

行等等對我來說不是活的，它們只是紙上的字。聽起來很不錯，但對一個學生來說，它是非常的遙遠。就在我十九歲時，也就是1997年，我對佛教的興趣有個新的轉向。

那年父親突然過世，他的死亡帶給我很大的震撼，看著他受苦而不能幫助他。不只是他，在醫院看到更多的病人，我所看到的是個我不熟悉的世界，死亡和病苦突然感覺很真實、很切心。父親過世後我跟家人開始每個週末去寺廟，朋友不了解為什麼整天往寺廟跑？生活無憂無慮為什麼需要拜懺？拜那麼多佛？做功德？有好多事情要做，為什麼靜坐在那裏？去參加共修的寺廟，大多數是老一輩的中國人，沒辦法和他們溝通，因為他們的話題通常是繞著他們的媳婦、孫子、老年等等。至於佛法如何應用在我們年輕人緊湊的學生生活和事業上，在寺廟裏沒有人可以給我滿意的答案。

直到2001年，金輪寺恆是法師向我提到DRBY在法界聖城的研習會，從此我開始固定參加DRBY的學習營。透過DRBY可以用英文學佛法，也認識其它同齡且對佛教有興趣的人。2001年後幾乎每個聖誕節或新年我都在萬佛城過的，好像只有一年沒有。

現在回憶有三個重要的因素影響我。第一是親近善知識。如果沒有家人愛的關懷和一個吃素上寺廟的好因緣；如果沒有DRBY的法友一起學習佛法；如果沒有法師、老師們的教導和帶領研習營及法會等等，今天就不會有一個坐在佛堂上充滿法喜和生命意義的我。

第二是信仰。我是來自一個所有結果都需要有所根據，有

可觸摸的工程背景；但這些年來，我信心的增長是來自於心靈上的結果。怎麼說呢？學佛帶給我自信，減少困惑及優柔寡斷。知道當布施，或者參加法會時內心充滿了歡喜；無法以物質方面來解釋這心靈上的寧靜和喜悅，但這種感覺是非常真實，也非常實在。固定上寺廟有十多年了，這些年來過得平平安安沒有大困擾，要讀書就有補助金，要找工作就有工作。雖然不能證明這是因為拜懺、修福的緣故，但相信它是因為我時時親近佛法。因緣果報太複雜並不是我們可以用世間知識能夠解釋的，對我而言，「保持信仰」就是不管遇到任何的困難，或者缺乏眼前的感應而能保持堅定的信心繼續修。

第三點是受持。持什麼呢？受持戒律和保持固定的功課。回想在大學和研究所的生活，若沒有持戒，我現在一定很糟糕。以我個人經驗所見，酒、毒品、性在大學是很普遍的，這種文化背景引導我們往一個與佛陀所教導相反的方向走。當父親過世時，我們在台灣受三歸依，我的歸依法師知道美國很開放，就叫我和姐姐每天早上念一遍楞嚴咒。雖然不能確定楞嚴咒的力量給我和姐姐起了什麼效用，但知道已安然度過那幾年，而沒有染上惡習。所以我相信堅持戒律和有個人固定的功課，是很重要的。

religion, I decided that I would look into Buddhism first since it was very accessible. I said to myself that after I learn about Buddhism I would look into other religions. I would study them one by one to see which one makes the most sense to me. Well, I did not know that the Buddhadharma is so

vast and deep that to this day I have not looked into a second religion!

When I was thirteen, I told my mom that I wanted to become a vegetarian. She acquiesced. After I turned vegetarian, my oldest sister followed, and then my dad and my other sister also turned vegetarian after a few years. It wasn't until recently that I realized how fortunate it is to have a vegetarian family. Through DRBY (Dharma Realm Buddhist Young Adults), I met many people who have turned vegetarian but whose families don't support them in their vegetarianism. I have a lot of admiration for my Dharma friends because it is not easy to maintain a belief when people around you, especially those closest to you, don't believe in what you believe. It takes more character and a strong resolve to stay vegetarian. So I have my family to thank for making things easy, especially my mom who over the years took a lot of heat from relatives who reprimanded her for making us kids eat vegetarian.

I led a very happy childhood. I did not know what suffering was and my friends who also have good families did not know what suffering was. I led a very ordinary, busy life as a student in high school and college. The Buddhist ideas I studied as a kid in Buddhist texts such as the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and the Bodhisattva's practices were not alive to me. They were words on paper that sounded very good and idealistic yet far away from my every day student life. Then in 1997, at age 19, my interest in Buddhism took a new turn.

That year my dad passed away unexpectedly. My dad's passing touched me deeply. I watched him suffer and felt helpless that I couldn't

do anything. It wasn't just him -- I saw that many patients in the various hospitals that we went through suffered as well. It was not a world that I was used to. The suffering of illness and of dying felt very real and close to my heart. After my dad's passing, I started going to the temple regularly on weekends with my family. My friends didn't understand why I went to the temple so much. After all, life is good and happy, why do you need to go to repentances? Why do you need to bow to the Buddhas so much? Who needs merit and virtue? Why do you need to meditate and sit still when they are so many things and activities to do? In the temple the people that attended the ceremonies were mostly elderly Chinese. It was hard for me to relate to their problems which were often about their daughter-in-laws, grandkids, or old age in general. Also, no one could explain Buddhism to me in a way that seemed relevant to the young, fast pace, accelerated school and career lives that my friends and I experienced.

In 2001, Heng Shr Fa Shr at Gold Wheel Monastery told me about the DRBY conference at the City of the Dharma Realm in Sacramento. It was through DRBY that I was able to learn the Buddhadharmas in English and find other people of my age who were also interested in Buddhism. After the conference, I started attending DRBY events regularly, and since 2001 I've spent nearly every Christmas or New Years at CTTB.

Reflecting on what's taken me to this point in my life, I recognize the importance of three things. The first is drawing near Good Knowing Advisers. Without my family to provide love and care, and to provide a



張簡嘉乃 (中間面對鏡頭者) 正在與其它佛青做研討。
Amy Chang-Chien (center) is having a discussion with other DRBY members.

good living environment for me to be a vegetarian and to go to the temple together, without my Dharma friends in DRBY to study Buddhist principles together and to have a community of our own, and without all the Dharma Masters and teachers I've met in my life to provide guidance and to lead the retreats and ceremonies, I would not be where I am today, sitting in the Buddha Hall right now, full of Dharma joy and purpose in life.

The second thing I recognize is the importance of having faith or belief. I come from an engineering background where everything is based on logical explanation and tangible results. However, over the years I have developed a sense of faith that's based on the result of the state of my mind. This faith has given me a sense of confidence, less confusion and less indecision in what I do. For example, I know that I am full of joy when I practice giving and also when I attend dharma sessions. I cannot explain exactly how this peace and joy of mind and heart come about, but I do know that these positive mental states are very real and tangible to me. I have gone to the temple regularly for more than ten years now, even though all

these years my life has been safe and sound and without much hardship, that when I wanted to go to college I had financial aid, and that when I wanted to work I found a job. Even though I cannot say for sure that these are due to the regular repentances and planting of blessings that I do, I have faith that it is due to keeping close to the Buddhadharmas. The workings of karma and retribution are too complex and are beyond our worldly knowledge and explanations. For me, having faith is to keep going and maintaining a strong belief despite any apparent hardships or lack of immediate, materialistic results or responses.

The third thing that I recognize is the importance of upholding and maintaining -- upholding the precepts and maintaining some form of practice. Reflecting on my life during college and graduate school, if it wasn't for the precepts, I think my life would've been pretty messed up by now. In my personal experience, alcohol, drugs, and sex were readily available in college and universities. Our culture steers us in a very different way than what the Buddha teaches us. When I took the three refuges in Taiwan at the time when my father was dying, my three-refuge Dharma Master knew that America was very liberal and instructed my sisters and I to recite the Shurangama Mantra. So I recite it once a day in the morning everyday. Again I cannot say for sure what the power of the Shurangama mantra had done for my sisters and me, but I know that I got through those formative years of my life safely and without succumbing to bad habits. Thus I believe it is important to consistently hold the precepts and to always have a personal practice.