

Master first started teaching Americans, someone told him that this is an impossible task. I am an American, born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area. Although I have made many serious and not-so-serious mistakes in the past and will make many more in the future, I can firmly and confidently say that the Venerable Master has taught and transformed me in many ways. He has been my teacher in the past and in the present, and he will be my teacher throughout all of future time until I myself embody *the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra* and the power of Guan Shi Yin Bodhisattva. Only then will I truly be able to help him in his work.



話……」，記得上人剛開始教化美國人時，有人告訴上人，美國人難調難伏。我是土生土長在舊金山灣區的美國人，過去雖然我犯了很多錯誤，將來也許還會再犯，但是我堅信上人在許多方面已教化、改變了我。上人是我去世的師父，現在生中的師父，在無窮盡的將來，直到我能證到《妙法蓮華經》裡的諸佛境界，及具足觀世音菩薩的大威神力，只有到那時，我才真正能輔佐上人的事業。

The Story of Buddhist Council in 1980's

A talk given by Roger Kellermen in the Buddha Hall at CTTB on June 19, 2010



80年代難民救濟中心

凱樂門
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Translated into Chinese by Fow Ze
佛子中譯

We are here this weekend for the 15th anniversary of the Venerable Master's Nirvana, which will be celebrated tomorrow. Tonight I would like to talk about the origins of the Buddhist Council, which could never have come about without the Venerable Master's guidance.

First let's go back to 1979: in those days the population of CTTB was about 40. One day at the meeting, the Venerable Master mentioned that he had heard that Vietnamese boat people who were escaping from Vietnam as refugees had been denied safe landing off the coast of Malaysia. They were being told to turn their boats around and head back into the ocean, and that they

明天我們要紀念上人的圓寂15週年，所以今晚我想藉這個機會談談當初佛教難民中心的情形。當時如果沒有上人主持的話，聖城是不可能成立難民救濟中心的。

在1979年的時候，聖城的住眾總共約40位。有一天，我們在聖城開會的時候，上人提到越南有很多難民搭著船逃離越南，小船到了馬來西亞以後，馬來西亞政府不肯收容，把船再推到大海裡頭去，他們經歷太多的苦難——苦中苦。這些人失去了所有的財產、家庭和國家，現在不得不繼續尋找安全的地方以得庇護。上人說：「你看！聖城有這麼大的地方，我們應該可以想辦

were undergoing too much suffering--suffering within suffering. These people had lost all their possessions, their families, and their country, and now they had to continue to search for a safe place to take asylum. The Venerable Master said: "Look! We have such a huge place here--we should be able to do something to help these poor people."

At that time in America, there were twelve volunteer organizations that could bring such people as refugees into America. Most of them were Christian organizations--both Protestant and Catholic. Within what seemed to be a short period of time, we became the thirteenth volunteer organization to apply to the government for a permit to do this work. We called our organization the Buddhist Council for the Rescue and Resettlement of Refugees.

The theory was really simple: we could rotate the families. The families would stay at the City for about four months. We brought the refugees to CTTB and gave the parents job training. There were two main areas that we offered training in--gardening and janitorial work. Then we settled them in another part of the country where we had offices, so that they wouldn't impact California. While they were here, the children attended our schools and learned some English. Each family moved from CTTB to the job they had been trained for, and then their place was filled by another family. And so they kept rotating through. The building that is just west of here, Bodhi House, where lay women are staying now, was the Buddhist Council Building. At any one time we had as many as 140 people living there, both children and adults.

I was meant to be the director of the ESL (English as a Second Language) program. The only trouble was that I had never taught ESL before. This was indicative of the Venerable Master's way of doing things. With the Venerable Master, everything was on-the-job training. We didn't know how to do a lot of things--but when you're thrown into the deep end of the swimming pool, you learn to swim very quickly. "You don't know how to

teach English? Well, just try your best."

I can still remember when the first refugees came, because their arrival started really slowly with at first only one or two families. The amazing thing to me was that they



法幫助這些難民。」

當時，在全美國有十二個民間的義工團體，在幫忙收容這些難民，大部分都是基督教、天主教這類宗教所辦的。沒有好久，我們法總曼都仙諾郡這邊，就變成第十三個收容這些難民的單位。難民救濟中心的英文全名簡稱BCRRR，B是佛教(Buddhist)的意思。

我們的作法很簡單，一個家庭在聖城住四個月的時間。這四個月期間，訓練成人一些求生的技能，做一些清潔、園藝等等的簡單工作；訓練好以後，就把他們送到其他州去，這樣才不會影響到加州這邊的就業情形。而小孩子就在聖城上學，學英文等等。所以每四個月以後，就會換另一批的難民家庭搬到聖城來。當初這些難民都住在離佛殿很近，現在女眾住的菩提精舍。有一段時間，差不多有總共140位大人、小孩住在聖城裡頭。

當初我是英語課程的負責人，問題是我從來沒有教外國人學英語的經驗。在開始之前，我覺得這就是上人的教導模式；跟著上人，任何事情都是做中學。很多事情原來都不知道怎麼做，一旦被丟到深水游泳池，很快就學會游泳了。上人說：「你不曉得怎麼教英語嗎？沒關係，盡力而為就是了！」

我記得很清楚，第一批難民來的時候，只有一、兩個家庭。令人訝異的是他們所有的家當，都放在一個塑膠袋裡頭。第一個到聖城來的家庭是經由泰國難民營轉來的，紅十字會給了他們一些東西，但是他們幾乎失去所有的東西，所以全家所有的財產，就是裝在一個塑膠袋裡。

這是上人另一方面的教導，佛教講人世間是「苦」；我們不需要到外頭去經歷，上人就把這些苦難帶到聖城來，

had all their possessions in one plastic bag. The first family came through a refugee camp in Thailand. After escaping Vietnam, they had gone to that Refugee Camp, and the Red Cross has given them a few things there. Basically, these people had lost everything. All they had in the world was now in one plastic bag.

This reveals another aspect of the Venerable Master's way of doing things. You want to learn about suffering? Well, you don't have to go out to see it, he will bring it here--and for the first time you will see what suffering really is. We heard really horrible stories about how these families escaped their home country where they had possessions, houses, and jobs, all of which disappeared in the blink of an eye. Then they arrived here at our doorstep with nothing.

The program got going quite slowly--first there was one family, then two, then three. The third to come was the Khanh family. The whole family came. I remember teaching English to all of them--to Mr. Khanh Giang, his wife, and his children--back in 1980. He has been here at the City of the Ten Thousand Buddhas ever since. Because we had limited resources in the adult division, we sent the kids to our boys and girls school where there was more room for them to have English classes.

As I mentioned earlier, we taught the adults janitorial and gardening skills. This training was arranged through the county, which provided us with instructors. Little by little the program developed. We started to take in not only Vietnamese but also Cambodian and Laotian people--and they all brought with them their tales of suffering, their tales of how they lost everything. It was particularly difficult for the Cambodian people: to get there they had to walk across the country. I remember one child both of whose parents had been murdered. He had lost them and was all alone in the world. All he had was the City of The Thousand Buddhas.

This refugee program was made possible by the Venerable Master's kind-heartedness. I don't think any of us would have come up with it on our own, because in the beginning there were about 40 people running CTTB, and we were not equipped to care for refugees without reallocating our resources. While the refugees were staying here, we tried to teach them about Buddhism. We taught them how to recite the name of Guan Yin Bodhisattva, who rescues all living beings. These poor people had lost everything and through our blessings, through the blessings of CTTB, they were able to receive some comfort before they started out on a new life in America.

讓我們親眼看到了真正的苦。這些難民當初逃離越南的怖畏故事。本來都有好好的家庭、好好的房子，有好的工作和財產；一瞬間，什麼都沒有了，他們空手來到你家門前。

剛開始的時候，來的人並不多，先是一個家庭、兩個家庭、三個家庭——第三個家庭，就是江鐘先生，他們全家都來了。我記得很清楚，在1980年教過他、他太太，還有他孩子英語，他到現在都一直留在聖城。因為我們成人部門的資源有限，小孩就送到男校、女校去讀書，因為那裡有比較多的教室，也比較有空間讓他們學英文。

這些大人，就訓練他們一些清潔和園藝的工作；這些訓練是和郡政府合作的，由郡政府派人過來訓練。慢慢地，這個難民救濟中心就越來越大了。我們不光收容越南的難民，連柬埔寨和寮國的難民也一併收容。這些難民都有非常苦難的經歷，尤其柬埔寨的難民，要走很長的一段路才能夠到海邊來。我記得有一個柬埔寨的小孩子，雙親在旅程中都被謀殺了，就剩他孤零零的來到聖城。

我要強調的就是，這些發展、收容難民的訓練，若沒有上人那麼廣大的心量，是不可能成就的。當初我們在聖城就只有四十個住眾，光是維護聖城的工作，已經讓我們忙得不可開交了，誰也不會想到去幫助這些難民的。他們待在這邊的期間，我們也教了他們佛法，教了觀世音菩薩尋聲救苦、救苦救難的法門。這些可憐的人失去了一切，但是藉由我們的福報、萬佛聖城的福報，讓他們在美國展開新生活之前，我們可以給他們一些關懷撫慰。