

Changes in the Mother-Son Relationship

親子關係的改變

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A talk given by James Roberts on June 20, 2011 at the Buddha Hall of CTTB

For those of you who may not know me, my name is James Roberts, and my Dharma name is Chin Zhe. I was invited to practice speaking Dharma tonight -- but since I'm not very skilled at speaking Dharma, I'm just going to tell you a story about my coming to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas (CTTB), and how that has helped create good roots in my life.

There have been two deaths in my family since I came to CTTB in December: my grandmother, my mother's mother, passed away on Christmas morning, while I was at the Chan session. So I missed her funeral. My thinking at the time was that it was more important for me to stay here at CTTB and cultivate than



大家可能不認識我，我的名字叫詹姆斯·羅伯斯，法名叫親哲。今天晚上來練習講法；但我本身並不是很善於講法，就只講我來到聖城的故事，以及它如何在我生命的旅程裡，幫助我增長善根。

去年十二月來到萬佛城之後，我家裡面有兩位親人過世了。一位是我的外祖母，媽媽的母親；她在去年聖誕節的早上過世了，當時我正在這裡打禪七，因而錯過她的葬禮。當時心想，我留在聖城修行，比留在家裡更重要。畢竟，我住在緬

to be at home in person. After all, my brother was home in Maine, taking care of my mother, and he was always closer to her anyway, so I thought it would be better for him to provide support for her. This was a typical way for me to think about my family for most of my adult life, before I moved here to CTTB.

One thing that changed for me during that time is that I started calling my mother much more often. In the past, most of our phone conversations had felt very one-sided. My mother would usually call me, and in a very motherly way would ask about all the things that were happening in my life. I would answer her questions mostly because it was the easiest way to talk to her. After each call, I would rarely call her back, and usually we wouldn't talk again until she made an effort to make contact again. In the back of my mind I always had an idea that this meant I wasn't really being a good son, that somehow I wasn't really appreciating my mother the way I was supposed to. I think I still found a lot of her attention annoying, like a teenager who wants nothing else but to get out of the nest and finally be free. Even though I'd been fairly independent for many years, I had still not really let go of this attitude from my adolescent years.

So during the Chan session, after I had heard the news from my brother that my grandmother had passed away, I called my mother to see how she was doing, to see if she wanted to talk about anything, and just to listen to her. I think this phone call was a major turning point in my relationship with my mother, because it was, perhaps, the first time in my life that I reached out to my mother to just listen to what she had to say.

About a month later, my stepfather, who had developed cancer over the previous year, was told by his doctor that the cancer had spread to his blood and he would certainly die. His health deteriorated rapidly. My mother decided to stop working to stay at home and take care of him, and I began calling to talk to her more and more often, again, really just listening to what she had to say. The more I called, the more I began to appreciate that I was developing a new kind of relationship with her, one that was much more supportive of her, but also one that I was benefiting from in an entirely new way. When I would call, I would only ask her about how things were for her, how my stepfather was doing, if she was getting all the support that she needed, if she was also taking care of herself. I also noticed that I was enjoying these conversations with my mother much more than I ever had with our old style of relating.

My stepfather passed away in March, and I went home this time, for several weeks, staying with just my mother in the house I grew up in. We went for walks together every day, and went shopping for food together. I cooked dinner every night (always vegetarian of course). She told me stories about what the past few months had been like, and thought about what she wanted to do in the future.

因州家中的哥哥，在各方面總是更親近母親，他正照顧著她；所以我認為對母親而言，他會提供更好的支柱。在搬到聖城之前，這是我考量家人的典型思維。

在聖城的日子，我有了一些改變，就是越來越頻繁地打電話給母親。以前和母親的電話會談，都是流於單方面的——總是母親打電話給我，就是那種「很媽媽的」關懷，來問我的生活情況。而我大多數就只是回答，因為那是和她最容易的談話方式。講完每一通電話之後，很少回打給她；總是要等到她想要和我聯絡時，才會再次交談。在腦海深處，一直有個想法：這意味著我不是真正在做一個好兒子，不知怎的，我也沒有真正對母親付出應有的感恩。另一方面還發覺，她大多數的關注，都令我感到厭煩；就像十幾歲的青少年，除了掙脫鳥籠而終能自由飛翔以外，別的什麼也不要。雖然已獨立生活多年，但是我還是沒有真正放棄這種從青春期的叛逆態度。

所以打禪七的時候，聽我兄弟說外祖母已經往生了，就立刻打電話給媽媽，問她情況怎麼樣？有沒有什麼想告訴我的？然後就一路聽她講。我想這通電話在我與母親的關係上，是一個重要的轉捩點；因為那可能是生命中第一次主動聯絡母親，而且只是傾聽，聽她講她想說的話。

約一個月之後，醫生告知去年罹患癌症的繼父，癌細胞已經擴散到血液裡面了，他肯定會死。他的健康迅速惡化，我媽媽決定辭掉工作，在家裡照顧他；我就越來越常打電話給媽媽，同樣地，每次就只是聆聽她聊心事。電話打得越多，我就越開始感激我和她正發展著一種新的關係，這對她非常有幫助，而且自己也從這個全新的關係中受益。打電話時，會問她事情是否順利，繼父情況怎麼樣，她是否得到所需要的全部支援，以及她是否也有照顧好她自己。我發現，比起以前的相處方式，更喜歡和媽媽做這樣的交談。

後來繼父在三月往生了，這次我趕回家去，在我成長的那棟屋子裡，單獨與母親同住了幾個禮拜。那段時間，和母親每天都會一起去散步，一起去超市買食物。每天晚上煮晚餐給她吃（當然都是煮素食）。她告訴我一些故事，諸如前幾個月的種種，以及她想在未來做什麼。我也和她分享一些在萬佛聖城所學的佛教歌曲和唱誦。

I shared songs and chants with her that I'd learned at CTTB. We found new common ground between Dharma Master Sure's Dharma songs and the peace-loving songs that my mother knew from the 60s and 70s. Our relationship continued to change for the better, and in entirely new ways. I think this spring my mother and I finally learned how to become friends.

My stepfather's body was cremated, and we had a small service at the church I had gone to when I was younger. I grew up attending the Unitarian Church in Bangor, Maine, which is where my mother and my stepfather met. The church is very open minded, with affinity groups for Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Islam. Later that week, my mother and I went to the Buddhist affinity group at the church, where we had a short mediation and discussion. In the evening my mother would sit and work on her Sudoku puzzles, while I did recitations for my stepfather. Before bed, my mother and I would hug and say "I love you" to one another. I remembered when I was younger, we used to have the same ritual, which somehow we had both forgotten during my adolescence.

Now that I'm back at the City, I often call my mother in the afternoon just to check in. I feel like I'm an important support person for her, and we are closer than we've been since I was very young. I've become much better at listening to her, and I find a lot of comfort in talking with her. Sometimes when I'm feeling uneasy I'll call her just to listen to her talk, and I find that talking to her helps me feel more connected and grounded. It's amazing how much has changed between us over the past few months.

I think somehow the conditions that came together, with losses in my family and my decision to move to CTTB, created a way for my mother and me to resolve some of our past karma. For me, being at CTTB allowed a lot more space for me to contemplate, without getting so caught up in my own concerns and worries, and with more space to listen and pay attention. At the same time, being near the Venerable Master's teachings on filiality helped me to think more about how I might be able to treat my mother differently. For me and my family, all of these conditions came together at the best time for me to return a little bit of the kindness of my mother.

I think one of the most important lessons I've learned from this, which is something I could never learn just from studying, is that when a person has the support of a caring community, it supports that person in taking better care of their own family -- something that brings benefits to everyone. Amitabha.



在實法師的佛法歌曲與她所知的六七十年代那些愛好和平的歌曲之間，我們找到了新的共同點。在這全新的方式裡頭，我們之間的關係持續地越變越好。我想今年的春天，和媽媽終於學會了彼此成為好朋友。

後來繼父的遺體火化了，我們在我年輕時常常去的那個教堂裡，舉行了一個小小的紀念儀式。我是在緬因州班格市唯一神教派的基督教教堂長大的，母親和繼父也是在那邊認識的。這個教堂作風很開明，其附屬社團包括了基督教、猶太教，還有佛教、伊斯蘭教。後來在那個禮拜，媽媽和我就去那個教堂，跟佛教社團的朋友一起打坐了一會，並做了簡短的討論。在傍晚為繼父念經祈福時，母親坐下來玩數獨謎題。晚上要去睡覺前，就跟母親互相擁抱說我愛你。我記得小時候，每天晚上我們都習慣這樣做；可是不知怎的，到了青少年的時候，好像我們都忘掉了這麼一回事。

現在回到聖城，還是常常會在下午的時候打電話給母親，就只是問候問候她。覺得自己是母親的一個很重要的支柱；比起從年輕以來的那段時期，我們更加親近了。我變得更善於傾聽；與她交談，令我得到許多慰藉。感覺不安的時候，我會打電話給她，就只是聽她說話；我發現和她談話，能幫助我更心神集中和踏實。過去的幾個月，我們關係改變之大，真是令人驚歎！

無論如何，這是由於失去家人，和搬到聖城做義工的決定，因緣際會而成的；這也走出一條路，讓媽媽和我能夠消融彼此過去的一些宿業。在萬佛聖城，能讓我有更大的空間迴光返照；而不致被自己的顧慮和煩惱綁得死死的，也有更多的空間來聆聽以及集中注意力。同時，因為能夠親近上人對孝道的教誨，使我能夠想得更多，明白可以用不同方式來孝順母親。對於我和我的家庭來說，所有的這些因緣在最佳時機聚到一起，讓我能夠回報母親慈恩於萬一。

我所學到的最重要的課程，一個僅僅從書面上永遠學不到的，就是一個人得到關懷他的團體的支持時，也支持了這個人去對自己的家人採取更好的照顧——這是利益每一個人的事情。阿彌陀佛！