

馴象故事的啟示

Revelation of Elephant Training



丁堯菁文·粉荳苗 英譯

Written by Crystal Ding

English Translated by Pink Sprout

Ethan第一次去華嚴聖寺週日學校試聽時，Eva老師給大家講了一個有關馴象的故事。故事裡有個僧人去探望他的師兄——一位著名的馴象師。當他踏進師兄的院子，看到了一幅奇怪的景象：一隻碩大成年的公象，腿上拴著一條細細的鏈條，它似乎根本沒有想要去掙脫，只是安靜地在那個無形的圈子裡經行。

僧人覺得十分奇怪，就向師兄請教。師兄說這頭象一出生就被牽上那條纖細的鏈條，牠嘗試一次、兩次、無數次掙脫，但是根本不可能辦到的；漸漸地，牠放棄了。在牠的印象裡，那鏈條根本就是不可能戰勝的。這個概念已經根深蒂固了，就算成年以後，掙脫那根鏈條已是輕而易舉的事了，但是牠仍然老老實實地，任由鍊條約束牠的自由。

老師接下來的一段話，讓我印象十分深刻。她說就像植物的根莖如果長歪了，園丁再怎麼努力，大樹即使可以長得枝葉繁茂，但仍然是歪歪扭扭的，很難重新長直。所謂「百年樹人」也是這樣，良好的根基，對於孩子將來的人格發展有舉足輕重的影響。問題是，如何給孩子一個良好的文化氛圍呢？

我們夫妻來自於中國，傳統的中國文化，是我先生一力推崇的。我那時總是笑他：別的孩子在媽媽肚子裡，胎教聽的是莫扎特，我們家兒子還得聽〈大悲咒〉、《三字經》；別人家孩子的睡前故事是迪斯尼童話故事，我們家兒子多數情況是《弟子規》。跟我先生相比，我比較接受西方那種自由的成長環境——沒有題海戰術，沒有三天一小考，五

The first time my son, Ethan, attended Sunday School at Avatamsaka Monastery, Ms. Eva told a story about elephant training. The story began with a monk that visited his brother who was a famous mahout. When the monk stepped into his brother's ranch, he saw an adult elephant tied to a very thin chain, but the elephant didn't struggle. The elephant just circled quietly in the ranch with its chain on.

The monk was puzzled by what he had just witnessed. The mahout explained that the elephant was chained not too long after its birth. At first, the elephant would try to escape the chain, but eventually realized that escape was impossible; it had ceased to struggle. Although the adult elephant could have easily escaped the chain, the idea of being unable to escape had long been imprinted in the elephant's memory, and so it remained chained.

Then, Ms. Eva's next sentence made a long-lasting impression on me. She said if a tree's roots were crooked, even if it grew to be tall and lush, its roots were still crooked despite the best effort from its gardener. This analogy illustrated the importance of instilling ethical principles in young children. Instilling moral principles in kids at an early stage is essential for their future personal growth. So the question became, how can we offer a positive and cultural environment for our children?

We came from China, so my husband prefers traditional Chinese values. It always makes me smile when it comes to Ethan's upbringing. In addition to listening to Mozart when Ethan was still in my womb, he listened to the Great Compassion Mantra and Trimetric classic as well. While other children listened to Disney stories as bedtime stories, ours listened to The Standards for Students. Contrary to my husband's belief, I actually preferred

天一大考。我覺得這樣的寬鬆，有利於孩子的成長。還沒有做媽媽時，我也曾戲言，等我有了孩子，絕不報名參加各種的補習班，我就要帶著他一起玩，一起瘋。

但是等自己真的當了媽媽以後，覺得肩上的擔子一下子沉重起來。古人云：「養不教，父之過。」對我而言，如果生而不教的話，媽媽何嘗沒有責任？可是怎樣的教育才對他有幫助呢？怎樣才能在中國傳統教育與西方寬鬆教育中間找到平衡點？

「馴象師的故事」使我開始支持先生的想法，決定報名加入週日學校。雖然Ethan當時只有三歲，沒到學校規定的入學年齡，但是法師仍然破例讓Ethan來試試。沒想到，小傢伙居然就喜歡上了周日學校。每到週六，只要提醒他第二天是周日，他都會很配合地把校服放在床邊，然後早早上床睡覺。

來週日班已經有一年多了，經過這一段時間的熏陶，現在Ethan在老師眼中是個超有正義感的小朋友。他樂於照顧比他小的小朋友，是老師的小幫手。我們非常欣慰地看到，育良教育正在他的身上產生潛移默化的影響；而孝親尊長，仁義禮智信這些中國的傳統美德，正是通過華嚴聖寺週日學校的堅持得以傳承。

「勿以善小而不為，勿以惡小而為之」，希望在法師和老師們的指導下，Ethan有一個良好的成長環境，從年幼的時候即能擁有識辨善惡的能力。這樣即使往後所接受的是以西方寬鬆教育為主，但是基礎已打穩固，就像植物的根莖是筆直的，在成長過程中只要稍加引導，這棵小樹都不會成為一棵歪扭的殘樹。

the Western style of a more relaxed and liberal upbringing for my child. I didn't want to cram my child with quizzes or tests. I even vowed not to send my child to cram schools before I was a mother. I envisioned that I would be a playful mom and we would go crazy together. However, after giving birth, I suddenly felt all the weight on my shoulders. There is an old Chinese saying, "It's the father's fault for not teaching his son the proper ways." To me, if I were just giving birth and not disciplining my child, I should be equally at fault. What is the best education for him? How do I find the balance between Eastern and Western cultures?

At the beginning, I had my doubts. After hearing the story of elephant training, I started to support my husband's stance. We applied Ethan to Avatamsaka Sunday School. Ethan was only three at the time and did not meet the age requirements. The Dharma Master still agreed to let Ethan attend. Much to my surprise, he actually enjoys going to Sunday School. As long as we remind Ethan that the next day is a Sunday, he would always put his uniform right next to his bed and go to bed early.

Ethan has been attending Sunday school for more than a year now with minimal absence. We can see how the environment is slowly influencing him. In the eyes of his preschool and daycare teachers, Ethan is a righteous child. Not only is he willing to help out other children, he is also a great little helper for his teachers. We are very happy to see the positive effects of Sunday school on Ethan. The teaching at Avatamsaka Monastery Sunday School manifests the core virtues of filial piety, kindness, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness.

Do not refrain from giving a small amount of goodness because it is small; do not participate in an ounce of evil because it is small. We hope that under the influence of the Dharma Masters and teachers, Ethan can grow up in a virtuous environment and develop proper understanding between good and bad. Even if he might be receiving a more liberal style of education, basic moral principles will have been instilled already. It is similar to the tree analogy. If a tree's roots are straight, with enough care, the tree will not grow crooked.