



The Efficacious Power of the Ritual for Receiving the Moral Precepts 受戒的力量不可思議

A talk given by Bhikshu Heng Shun in the Buddha Hall at CTTB on July 30, 2014

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BODHI FIELD 菩提田

First, I want to say as I always do when I first give a Dharma talk during a Session, just how fortunate we are all to be here at the City of 10,000 Buddhas to cultivate the Buddhist path together. To express this idea of how fortunate we are to be here, I found a quote by the Venerable Master that he gave in 1992, when he was coming up pretty regularly to give Dharma talks here at the City. In this talk (July 13, 1992), he quoted the opening line from the *Great Learning*, which says, “The way of the Great Learning is that we manifest our brilliant virtue, we cherish the people and we abide in the ultimate good.” He then went on to say, “Do not take lightly the affinities that have brought us all here to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. Take care of those who are near at hand- teach and transform those close by- do not seek for what is far away. We should cherish each other like our own father and mother.” Thinking about this statement by the Venerable Master, it also reminded me of a Sutra from the Theravada tradition called the *Mother Sutra* (Pali: Mata Sutta). In this Sutra the Buddha says that in the world, in Samsara, “A being who has not been your mother, father, brother, sister, son, or daughter at one time in the past (past lives) is not easy to find.” That means that all living beings in the universe have had been one of our close relations in our past lives.

首先要說每次法會我第一次講法時都要先說的話：我們非常幸運能到萬佛聖城來修行。我在準備今天晚上的講法的時候，找到上人在一九九二年的一段開示，說明我們有多麼幸運。那時上人經常進城來講法，在一九九二年七月十三日，他引用了《大學》裏的頭一句話：「大學之道，在明明德，在親民，在止於至善。」然後他接著說：「不要小看了我們到萬佛城修行的因緣，這不是一個簡單的因緣。所以我們大家應該好好地珍惜和照顧你身邊的人，互相體恤，就像我們照顧自己的父母親一樣。」

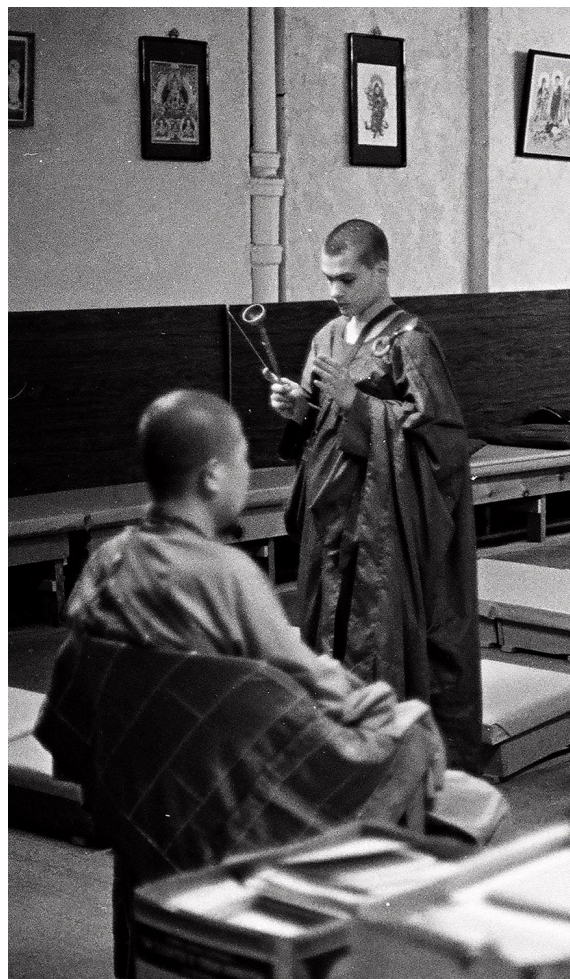
想起上人這話，我聯想到了在南傳的一部經典《母親經》（Mother

The topic for my talk tonight is something that really fascinates me and has had such a big impact on my life and on the lives of many of us here. It is about the efficacious power that is invoked when we go through the ritual of receiving the moral precepts and receive the “substance” of the moral precepts. The Venerable Master said that in order to get this substance of the moral precepts, you have to go through a formal ritual, which is conducted by traditionally ordained monastics. In a quote from the Master’s explanation of the *Shurangama Sutra* (volume one), he said, “It is absolutely essential for people who want to cultivate the Path to receive the moral precepts. If you can guard the pure precept-substance, then you are as beautiful as a gleaming pearl... The merit gained by receiving and maintaining the moral precepts is inconceivably great and wonderful.”

I wanted to tell a personal story about this special and efficacious force or power of the moral precepts. It was an experience that had a tremendous impact on my life. Once I went through the ritual of receiving the moral precepts for the first time in my life, everything in my life went through a total and unexpected changed. This reminds me of how the Venerable Master taught us that the Sutra that is most true and real for each one of us, is the one that we’re writing in our own lives.

Before telling the story, let me give some background information. When I first studied Buddhism, I was a senior in a high school in a suburb of Chicago (Elk Grove) and I wrote this paper for my senior English class. I did a rather thorough comparison of the ultimate goals for Buddhism and Christianity. That was the very first time I had read anything in Buddhism. That was back in 1969-70. I had read about five or six books on Buddhism to produce this thesis about the differences and similarities in Christianity and Buddhism. At that time I had developed a strong fondness for and devotion to studying Buddhism. After I graduated, I went to a big public university not too far from Chicago, called Northern Illinois University (NIU). At that time in 1970, there were not a lot of books on Buddhism. All the books that I had studied in high school weren’t that good. They contained a lot of misinformation and misinterpretations of the teachings of the Buddha. However, there was a professor at my university who had recently published one of the few good and accurate books on Buddhism. It was called the “World of the Buddha, an introduction to Buddhist literature.” He had published this in 1968. His name was Professor Lucien Stryk. In attending my university, they had just started an experimental program where some select academic classes were actually held in the large dormitory where we lived. Students got to talk to the professor outside the formal classroom setting and had a much more personal teaching experiencing. I got to meet this professor, listen to him lecture, and talk to him in person with other students over lunch. He was a real nice person and very knowledgeable about Buddhism. However, in talking to him and listening to him, I felt quite strongly that his approach to Buddhism was too academic. I wanted to know and see how Buddhism was practiced in daily life. So, I made plans to go to a Buddhist country where I could see Buddhism being practiced by people devoted to the Buddhist path in their daily lives. I went searching for a country like this that also had a well-established Buddhist monastic community with Western monks.

Sutra) 裏，佛講道：你有智慧看得過去的話，你會發現你這輩子碰到的人，幾乎沒有一位，在過去生不是你的親人；所以每一個我們這輩子所遇到的眾生，都曾在過去生裏，跟我們有很親近的關係。



今晚我要講的主題，是件真正震懾了我並對我的人生，產生了重大影響的事，那就是受戒而得到戒體強大的保護力量。上人說，要得到戒體，就一定要正式受戒，要在正法的道場從比丘傳受的戒，才能真正地得到戒體。上人在講《楞嚴經》時提到：「任何人要想修道就一定要受戒，如果你能夠好好地持戒，好好地守護清淨的戒體，你就會像一顆寶珠一樣的清淨、光明；受戒和持戒的功德是很大很不可思議的。」

Fortunately where I lived in the suburb of Chicago, Elk Grove Village, there was a city just a few miles away called Wheaton (Illinois). And it turned out that the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in America was located in Wheaton. Their bookstore in Wheaton was incredible. They had all kinds of books from India and other parts of the world on the various religions, focusing mostly on Hinduism, Buddhism, and general mystical traditions. These were books one could never find in any other bookstore. I was able to get some excellent Buddhist books, especially those published by the Buddhist Publication Society in Sri Lanka. Within a couple of years, I had bought and read over 50 books on Buddhism and another 50 or so

on Hinduism, mysticism, and other related topics in religion. A lot of the Buddhist books were written by Western monks who were already cultivating in Sri Lanka and Thailand. I ended up dropping out of college with the intent to study Buddhism overseas. I wrote the Buddhist Publication Society in Sri Lanka and asked them where I could go to study Buddhism as a living tradition in a Buddhist country. They said that I should go to Thailand, because there were already a good number of Western monks in Thailand. I worked to save enough money and flew out to Thailand in 1973.

During my nearly three-month visit to Thailand, I stayed in three different monasteries in Bangkok or close to Bangkok. When I first arrived, I lived in Wat Mahatat. Then I moved to Wat Pleng, and finally ended up at Wat Bovornives. I stayed in each of these temples or Wats for a little less than a month. I got to meet a lot of Western monks and was able to travel to meet some of the great masters of Thailand. I met Ajahn Chah in person at his monastery along with his 20 or so Western monks, as well as Ajahn Maha Bua with his group of about 15 or so Western monks. I met great teachers and good friends in the Dharma, and became devoted to the study of the Abhidharma. A monk from Australia, named Phra Dhammadhara, introduced me to his Abhidharma teacher, a middle-aged woman named Sujin Boriharnwaniket. She had exceptional and seemingly encyclopedic knowledge of the Abhidharma teachings, and would conduct one 3 to 4 hour class each week at Wat Bovornives that was attended mostly by Western monks and visiting scholars from other countries. At that time in 1973 she also had a daily morning radio show on the teachings of the Abhidharma for serious students of Buddhism in Bangkok. I was learning things in Thailand from monks and other teachers that I could never learn in a university. It was Buddhism as a way of life, a way of actual practice, rather than abstract theory. I was quite happy studying and practicing there.

In Thailand at that time, there was a limit to the number of visas one could get in one year. That number was three. So after I renewed my visa two times, it looked like I was going to have to leave the country and abandon my studies of Buddhism (at least



接下來，我想講講我自己和戒的力量故事，我自己受戒以後得到的感應。自從我第一次受戒以後，我的人生完全的改變了，有很多不可思議的事情發生。這使我想起上人常講的，沒有一部經是比我們自己的生活這部經還要真的。

我第一次研究佛教是在高中十二年級的時候，我在英文課裏寫了一篇論文，論文的題材是關於佛教和基督教的比較，那是在一九六九到七〇年間。我為了寫這篇論文，讀了大約五、六本佛教的書，我對佛教開始有興趣。

高中畢業以後，我到附近的NIU（北伊利諾大學）就讀，那年代也沒有太多佛教的書，而我在高中讀的那幾本書內容並不是那麼正確。但在我的大學裏，有一位教授寫了一本少有的好又正確的書：《佛陀的世界》，主旨是介紹佛教，在一九六八年出版的。那時候，那個大學剛開始一個實驗課程，就是，讓教授到宿舍裏頭來給學生們上課，所以我就和這位叫Lucien Stryk的教授很親近有很多機會可以跟他討論、學習。他

temporarily). However, the Thailand government allowed a foreigner to stay in the country as long as they wanted if they became ordained as a Buddhist novice or monk. Therefore, if I wanted to stay in Thailand, I had to become a monk or at least a novice. Although I really loved Thailand and liked the teachers and the many Western monks I had befriended, becoming a monk was a life-long commitment and I wasn't sure I wanted to spend the rest of my life in Thailand. I decided to come back to America.

When I came back to America, a very strange experience occurred. As soon as I walked through the front door of my parent's house, I immediately knew that I had to go back to Thailand and become a monk. I had suddenly changed my mind. I told my mom and dad I had it all planned out. I had met all these good monks and I knew exactly where I was going to be ordained and what my plans for the rest of my life were. I told them I was going to Bangkok, to study at Wat Bovornives, the best city monastery for Western monks. There I would study Pali, the Theravada Buddhist Canon, and the Abhidharma teachings for a couple of years. After that I would go to the forest monastery of Ajahn Maha Bua. At that time, 1973-74, there was a monk from England named Ajahn Pannavaddho who had already been a monk for 15 or so years under the tutelage of Ajahn Maha Bua. He was the senior Western monk in Thailand and his teacher was considered one of the most experienced and knowledgeable Masters in Thailand. I figured I was going to go there and spend the rest of my life in his forest monastery in the northern part of Thailand, across the Mekong River from Vientiane, Laos in the province of Udon Thani, Thailand. So I asked my mom and dad, if it was okay with them if I did that. And my parents told me what American mothers and fathers in these kinds of situations often say. They said, "If that's what makes you happy, then you have our blessing." When I think back to that time, it sounds so simple, yet my parents like so many other parents, always selflessly thought of what was best for their children. I'm sure that the idea of their son going to Thailand and never coming back again, must have been something very difficult to accept. Yet, out of what the Buddha said is the epitome of loving-kindness (Maitri), the parent's love for their children, they said okay.



是個很好的人，且佛教知識豐富，但後來我發覺，這位教授對佛教的研究太學術化，而我想要了解的是佛教怎麼運用到實際生活上。所以我就決定要到佛教的國家去參訪，看看到底在這些國家裏，人們怎麼樣在生活中實行佛道。我開始尋找一個佛教道場遍佈、同時有西方籍僧侶在的國家。

很幸運的，在我們學校附近，芝加哥近郊有一個城市叫 Wheaton，那兒有一個美國神學（哲學）學會的總部。他們有一個很棒的書店，那裏有些書是你在其他地方找不到的。他們有很多印度和世界各地的各種宗教的書，也有很多關於佛教的書。幾年內我買了五十幾本佛教的書，和大約五十本其

他宗教的書。這些書多是錫蘭的一個佛教出版社所出版的，很多是在泰國、在錫蘭的西方僧侶所寫的。

後來我就決定休學，想要出國學習佛法。我寫信給錫蘭的佛教出版學會說：我想去佛教國家參學。他們回信建議我去泰國；他們講，泰國已經有很多西方人在那邊出家修行。所以我就存了一些錢，然後在一九七三年飛到了泰國。

在我待在泰國的三個月內，我參訪了三個在曼谷的佛教的寺廟，在那邊我有因緣見到很多西方去的僧人和參訪一些佛教的大師，我面見阿姜查和他二十多位西方弟子，也見到阿姜曼尊者和隨從他的大約十五位西方僧人。我遇見了佛法上的良師益友，也致力於阿毘曇論的研究。但是後來碰到一個問題，就是我的簽證。那時泰國簽證一年只限申領三次，而我拿到簽證後，又延期兩次，不能夠再延下去，唯一能夠再待下來的方法就是出家；泰國政府有一個特別的規定，准許出家的外國人無限期居留。那時候我雖然對佛法有很大興趣，但出家是個一生的很大的決定，我也還不能確定是不是要一輩子待在泰國，所以我就回到美國。

回到美國，奇特的事情發生了，我一進了家門就

So I went back to work, saved money, and flew back to Thailand in January 1974. Several months later, March 31, 1974, I became a novice monk. I took the precepts of a Shramanera. I had never taken any moral precepts before in my life- not the five moral precepts or any moral precepts whatsoever. Even though I had already studied Buddhism for about five years at that time, I never formally took the moral precepts. There at the temple in Bangkok, Wat Bovornives, I received the moral precepts of a novice monk for the first time.

So at that point, my whole life was already mapped out for me. And this was just the first step in that plan for the rest of my life. However, about a month after I received these moral precepts, I read an English translation of the Lotus Sutra. I don't know why, but for all those years I was studying Buddhism, I never read a Mahayana Sutra. It was like some kind of karmic obstacle. So I decided to read it. It was one of the earliest English translations done by a person named H. Kern over 100 years ago (first published in 1884). I read it and I went, "Wow, this is what I've been looking for all my life in Buddhism. The way the Buddha is described in the *Lotus Sutra* is the way the Buddha really was." I was so moved while reading the Sutra, I cried many times. I had now unexpectedly become a believer in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. All the plans that I had laid out for my life had changed.

At that time I had a friend who had become a novice at my temple about six months before I did, who had also converted to the Mahayana and had gone to study in South Korea. He was originally from New Zealand and had become a monk in Korea with the monastic name Ham Wol. So I contacted him and made plans to go to Korea to study Buddhism with him and his teacher there. However, after a week or two, another Australian monk who resided in my temple, handed me a book and said, "I think you should read this book." It was the recently published biography of the Venerable Master, volume one of the Master's life in China (first printed in October 1973). I read this book, Shr Fu's biography, and I knew he was my teacher. I had been searching in Thailand (and also in Burma) and I met these good teachers but I never felt they were the real teacher that I was looking for. I never felt that any of them were my personal teacher. As soon as I read the Venerable Master's biography, I knew he was my teacher, my spiritual guide. I immediately wrote to Gold Mountain and said I wanted to come back to America to study with the Venerable Master.

This is a quote from the letter that I had sent to the Venerable Master while I was a novice in Thailand. Remember that after receiving the moral precepts for the first time, I had planned to spend the rest of my life in Thailand. Everything in my life had now changed rather dramatically. This is what I wrote to the Master in the middle of May in 1974:

I'm a beginner in the Dharma practice and new to the Mahayana Sutras, which I've only started reading only about a week and a half ago.

知道我應該回泰國去作一個出家人。我的心中立刻下了決定，所以我就跟我的父母親講：我想回去泰國長期地待下來，在曼谷那邊的寺廟有很好的出家人，我可以跟他們學習。我告訴他們，我想到曼谷寶伏寺幾年，對西方僧侶來說，那是最好的都市道場；之後我想到阿姜摩訶布瓦禪師的森林道場。那時候有一個英國人叫阿姜潘那維多的，在那邊已經出家十五年之久了，他是一位在泰國的資深西方籍僧人，而他的老師則被認為是泰國最有經驗和學問的大師之一，我想到這個在泰國北部的森林道場去好好地修行，長期地待下來。

我問我的父母親，同意不同意我回到泰國去長久地待下來。父母親的回答就和一般美國父母面對這情況時的答覆一樣，他們對我說：如果這樣能帶給你快樂，你就帶著我們的祝福去做。回顧當年，我的父母和許多其他父母一樣，不想自己只想什麼對子女最好。這事看起來簡單，但我相信那個兒子要去泰國再也不回來的主意，一定是很難接受的，然而就像佛說的，是典型的慈愛(Maitri)，父母對子女的愛，讓父母答應了孩子。

所以我就開始工作、存錢，然後在一九七四年的一月飛回泰國，三月三十一號在曼谷寶伏寺受沙彌十戒，成為一個初學僧。在這之前，我沒有受過任何戒，連五戒中的一條戒都沒有受過，就直接受了沙彌十戒，這是我第一次受戒。

那時，我已畫出我一生的藍圖，而這是第一步。本來我是打算這輩子都在泰國森林修行的。可是受了沙彌戒以後，很快就有很奇妙的事情發生。差不多一個月以後，有一個朋友給了我英文的《法華經》，那是最早期的英譯本之一，是H.Kern在一八八四年——大約一百年前就翻譯了。不知道為什麼，在這之前，我都沒有機會看到大乘的經典，那是因為我業障很深重，被障住了，沒有機會看到大乘經典。

讀了這部《法華經》以後，我馬上就痛哭流涕，發覺這才是我一生所要尋求的佛教。我毫無預期的成為一個大乘佛教的信仰者，我原先預計好的人生改變了。

那時有一位比我早半年出家的沙彌朋友，他轉到韓國去學習大乘佛法。我和他聯絡過後，也計

There's so much I don't understand and there's so much I want to learn. I hope you'll grant my request to develop along the true path at Gold Mountain Monastery.

I received permission to come and study at Gold Mountain Monastery and shortly thereafter, returned to America to study and practice under the guidance of the Venerable Master.

Incredible changes had taken place in my life. And I'm absolutely certain that this all came about because of this force- this incredible, efficacious and powerful force of going through that ritual of receiving the moral precepts of a Shramanera for the first time in my life. That is what opened up all these doors and possibilities, that were just waiting to be opened, but for some reason were being obstructed. One thing after another suddenly came to fruition after all these years of studying Buddhism, once I went through the ritual of receiving the moral precepts for the first time.

Again, we're so lucky to be here at the City of 10,000 Buddhas. Every time I come here into the Hall, when I bow to the Buddha and look at the image of Guan Yin Bodhisattva and the painted portrait of the Venerable Master, I just think, "Wow! We are all so fortunate to be in this situation in which we are able to worship and practice together in the Buddha Hall here at the City of 10,000 Buddhas. We should never take this for granted." I'm going to close with two quotes the Venerable Master gave about the City in his instructional talks here in 1992:

"In the whole world only the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas is really pure. All other places have some afflictions and some trouble. Here you can single-mindedly cultivate. You don't see, hear or speak of others' rights or wrongs. The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are always mindful and protective here at the City. If you really bring forth the Bodhi-mind, they will assist you." (August 25, 1992)

"Everything here at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas is good. Everything is fine. You have food, clothes, a place to live- everything is good. You should really cultivate the Path! If you still don't well-cultivate here at the City, then even if you're in the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha, you won't be able to cultivate. What are you waiting for? If you don't cultivate now, you will never cultivate. Don't miss this opportunity to cultivate the Path." (July 31, 1992) ❶

劃到韓國修習大乘。又過了兩、三個禮拜，有人給我一本書，那是剛出版的上人的傳記第一冊：上人在中國（1973年初印）。我讀著傳記，馬上就知道：上人才是我真正的師父！在這之前我遇見過很多高僧，可是都不曾有那個感覺說他們是我的師父；但我一看到上人的傳記，我馬上就曉得上人才是真正是我的師父。所以我馬上就寫信到金山寺來，（當時上人在金山寺），說我想回到美國來跟上人學習。

（比丘近永：順法師保留了他當初寫給上人的那封信，他的信是這樣寫的：

我是個佛法的初習者，剛剛才接觸到大乘的經典，我約在一個半星期前才開始讀大乘的經典，所以對佛教懂得非常的少。我希望能夠到金山寺來學習。）

不久我獲得了到金山寺學習的許可，所以我回到了美國，在上人座下修習。

那封信是在一九七四年的五月寫的，原來我已經打算好永遠在泰國的森林裏待下來，這個突然的變化，變化得這麼快，我認為完全是因為我那年的三月三十一號第一次受了戒的關係。受了戒以後，那不可思議的力量，把很多門、很多可能性都打開來了。原來這些門都被障住了。現在受了戒，因為受戒的力量，這些門都開了，讓我能夠進到一個新的世界。

讓我再說一次，能在萬佛城修行是很幸運的。每次我到佛殿來，當我拜佛、看到觀音像、看到上人的像，我都覺得我們非常非常的有福氣，能夠在聖城修行，所以我們不要小看了能夠到聖城來修行的機會。我想用上人的兩段有關聖城的簡短開示，做今天講法的結尾。

上人這麼說：「全世界只有萬佛城是清淨的地方，其他地方都有煩惱。在聖城你可以一心修行，你不見到、不聽到、也不講別人的是非。諸佛菩薩在這邊護念著，如果你能夠真正的發菩提心的話，諸佛菩薩都會來加持的。」（一九九二年八月二十五日）

另外一小段是：「在聖城所有的、各方面都是好的，我們這兒有吃的、有住的、有穿的，什麼東西都有，都好。所以你們應該真正的修道。如果在這兒你都不好好修道的話，即使到了西方極樂世界去你也不會修行的，所以你還在等什麼呢？如果你現在不修行的話，那你永遠都不會修行，所以不要錯過修道的機會。」（一九九二年七月三十一日）

阿彌陀佛！❷