

Gathering In

—Upasika Helen Woo Shares Her Experiences with the Next Generation

相逢在此刻—胡果相居士追憶上人

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My father, Yu Tianxiu, was an educator who received his PhD and five additional degrees in the United States. He was invited to teach at Beijing University, so I was born in Beijing in 1936. Now, I am eighty-three years old. When I was fourteen years old, I left Beijing and stayed in Hong Kong for a year and then came to the United States. I spent my teenage and college years here in the Bay Area, and then went on to City College and finished my education at Cal State, Los Angeles with a degree in Fine Arts. I appreciate the good life.

When I was a kid in Beijing, on Sundays we always went to a Christian Sunday school that offered a Salvation Army style of music education to sing songs—that was my earliest experience learning religious songs. As I grew up in the United States, I started going to a

我於1936年出生於北京，今年八十三歲。我的父親余天休是一位教育家，他在美國取得博士學位以及五個其他不同的學位。隨後他應邀去北京大學任教，所以我在北京出生。我十四歲的時候，離開北京，在香港住了一年，之後來到美國。我在灣區度過了青少年時期和大學時期。先後在市立大學和加州州立大學洛杉磯分校的藝術學院完成我的大學教育，我感恩過去美好的生活。在這之前，我在北京成長的過程中，週日我們會到基督徒的主日學去參加唱頌，那是像救世軍的音樂教育型態，是我最早學會的宗教歌曲。在美國成長期間，我開始上基督教教堂，最後遇到我的丈夫——他是一位虔誠的

Christian church, and eventually met my husband who was a very devout Catholic. Years later after I met Shifu (Venerable Master Hua), our family took refuge with Shifu. We all became very devout Buddhists because Shifu was our teacher.

During the countercultural movements in the 60s, there were many hippies and things started changing and so I think there was also a lot of moral confusion. But I had a wonderful life. At that time, you could say I was a party girl. That was the kind of life I was living.

I was always active when I was in college and after too. Yet, nothing made me really happy or truly satisfied. Finally, in the early 1970s, as I approached my fortieth birthday, I really started to search for an answer. Although I went through stages exploring the Catholic and Christian faiths, I thought their theories didn't answer all of my questions. Since I was approaching forty, I wanted to know what life was all about. Why am I here? After this, where will I go? Are we here temporarily for this short period of time and then gone forever? Those were the questions that started arising in my mind. I thought about this. I explored different religions and also had close friends of different religions. I also knew of the Muslim tradition. Yet, none of these religions really answered my questions about life. I thought I could try Buddhism after I visited many Buddhist temples in Taiwan in 1971, but I hadn't had a chance to go to a temple in China yet. The first time I went back to China was in 1979. Back then, there were really no Chinese religious places in America.

In 1976, my Taiwanese friend said to me, "We have a good Dharma Master right in San Francisco. Why don't you take refuge with him and be his disciple?" Actually I didn't know and never heard of the Master, since I had been in LA since 1957. That friend called Shifu and told him there were people who wanted to take refuge and he was very happy about it.

As time went on, more and more of my friends, even those who don't know anything about Buddhism were all curious and all wanted to take refuge and go to San Francisco. At first there were 10 people, but soon there were 15, 20, 50, 100, until there were around 150 people who wanted to go. There was no way we could arrange for them all to take buses, because I didn't know how to charter buses at that time. But, we had some nerve, and I had a friend call Shifu, even though none of us knew him yet. He asked him if because we had so many people, could he come down to LA? We know that it's very impolite to make such a request, since we should go to him to pay our respects and take refuge there instead of asking him to come down, but we had too many people.

天主教教徒。幾年後，我遇到師父，我們和孩子都皈依師父，師父是我們的老師，我們因此成為非常虔誠的佛教徒。

在六十年代，搖滾節奏盛行期間，有很多嬉皮，世風開始改變，道德觀變得混淆。但是我的生活很多采多姿，可以說我是個派對女孩，因為那是我當時的生活方式。

在大學時代和畢業後我一直很活躍，然而卻沒有什麼事情能讓我感到真正的快樂或滿足。在七十年代早期，接近四十歲的時候，我開始尋找答案。雖然我親近過天主教和基督教，但是它們的教義無法回答我所有的問題。因為自己快四十歲了，我想知道人生的意義，我為何會在此？之後會去哪裡？我們只是短暫停留在世上就永遠消失了嗎？我開始思考這些問題。我信仰過幾個不同的宗教，也有不同信仰的摯友，我對回教傳統也有所認識，但是仍然無法回答我對生命的疑惑。我想佛教或許有辦法，1971年我到台灣的時候，看到那裡有很多佛教寺廟。1979年我第一次回中國，但卻從未踏入過任何寺廟。當時美國並沒有漢傳宗教的道場，

1976年，一位台灣朋友告訴我：「有位很好的法師在舊金山，你何不皈依他、成為他的弟子？」事實上，從我1957年到洛杉磯至當時，未曾聽過有這麼一位法師。那個朋友打電話給師父說有人想皈依，師父很高興。

隨著時間流逝，越來越多朋友，甚至那些對佛教一無所知的朋友都感到好奇，想去舊金山皈依。剛開始只有十個人，很快就有十五個、二十個、五十個、一百個、甚至一百五十個人想去皈依。我們無法安排交通，因為我當時還不會租借大巴士。我們有點魯莽，儘管我們當中沒人認識師父，一位朋友給師父打了電話，問師父可不可以到洛杉磯，因為有很多人想要皈依。我們知道這是無禮地的要求，我們理當去拜師皈依，而不是要師父來一趟，但是我們的

Shifu was very compassionate and he agreed. When he first came down, he stayed in my house. He brought everybody. By everybody, I mean the very early disciples, including the Sangha (Buddhist monastics) and those people who lived around southern California who were already Shifu's disciples. Shifu already had many translations of sutras in Chinese and English. When he brought everybody down with him, he brought all those books with him too. He arrived at during the evening at the LAX airport. I had never met a Buddhist before, but I knew they were vegetarian, yet I didn't know how to prepare vegetarian food for the next day. I wondered, "What should I do?" When we went to the airport, a lot of us prepared a banner to welcome Shifu. Many people were very happy and they welcomed him in a respectful way at the airport, although none of us were Buddhist. We didn't know the traditional manner.

He came and stayed in my home in a small office downstairs. The monks and laymen stayed in the garage and the backyard. The nuns and ladies stayed inside our family room and in various places. I was so busy settling everybody that I didn't get to see Shifu at all. I was so excited that we had a wonderful teacher that came to us. I somehow knew he was someone special, although I had never met him. I never even saw him closely until the next morning. He was sitting on the couch in my living room. (Still the same one after 47 years.) Shifu was sitting on my white couch and I came near him. I knelt in front of him and looked into his eyes. My god, it was like something hit my stomach. My sensations were all mixed and emotional.

I felt like, "This is so terrible, and, gosh, I miss you so much, and I haven't seen you for so long! I finally found you again." I started crying; cried a lot — a lot of tears came down.

Shifu said, "You came back." That was all he said. At that time, Dharma Master Sure saw me crying and everything else. From then on, my life totally changed because I felt that I had come back. I knew for the rest of my life that I would be a different person.

You have to remember before I met Shifu that I was a party girl and did everything — played mahjong, danced, played music, went all over, just to have a wonderful time. The first few months after I met Shifu, he came every month. There were many people who heard Shifu was coming to Los Angeles and would come to my house to take refuge.

The first time he came, because we had so many people and didn't have a place or temple, I rented the Masonic Hall in South

人數實在太多。

師父非常慈悲滿我們的願。他第一次來洛杉磯的時候，住在我家。他把所有人都帶來了，所有人是指最早期的弟子、僧眾（佛教的出家人），以及那些住在南加州的弟子。當時師父已經出版很多中英文的經典譯本。他除了帶所有人，也帶了所有的書。他在晚間抵達洛杉磯機場。我從未遇過佛教徒，我知道他們吃素。然而我不知道怎麼為隔天準備齋菜，我暗忖該如何做？我們去機場的時候，很多人都準備橫幅來歡迎師父。大家都非常開心，在機場很恭敬地迎接師父。我們都不是佛教徒，如法的接待禮儀也不懂。

我家樓下有一個小辦公室，師父來就住在那。比丘們和男眾住在車庫和後院，女眾和比丘尼們住在客廳和屋內其他不同的地方。我忙著安頓每個人，根本沒空去見師父。我非常開心有一位很好的老師來到我們身邊。我隱約感覺到他很特別，雖然我們未曾謀面。直到隔天早晨之前，我都沒近距離瞻仰過師父。師父坐在我家客廳（四十七年之後，陳設依然一樣），師父坐在白色沙發上，我離他很近。我跪在師父面前看著他的眼睛。天哪！好像被什麼擊中我的胃，感覺相當複雜。

我感覺特別難受，天哪！就像久別重逢自己思念的人，我嚎啕大哭了起來。師父只說：「你回來了。」我想，當時實法師目睹整個過程。從那之後，我的人生徹底改變。我感覺自己回家了。我知道我將脫胎換骨成為一個不一樣的人。要知道在遇到師父之前，我是一個沉溺感官享受的人，打麻將、跳舞、玩音樂、到處尋開心。遇到師父後的最初幾個月，他每個月都來。很多人聽說師父要來洛杉磯，都來我家皈依師父。

師父來的那天，因為人實在太多，當時我們也沒有一個地方或者寺廟舉行皈依儀式，所以我租下位於帕薩迪那南邊的共濟會會堂，這個會所可以容納我們

Pasadena so it could accommodate all of us. When we went there, it was a very hot day in the summer, (the temperature was) in the 90s. In the old days, we didn't have any air conditioning, and Shifu wanted to instill goodness into us. We didn't understand and weren't traditional Buddhists; we were just a group of people, many who were younger than me. Most of us never heard of bowing before and Shifu wanted us to start the ceremony by bowing. We bowed and continued bowing for about 3 hours, and at times we all looked at each other, turning around, wondering what's going on? What is this? When the bell went 'ding', we bowed. We got so hot, and some could not stand it. Later on, I understood that Shifu knew we had very heavy karma and lots of bad habits. To be his disciple, we had to get rid of some bad karma, so we had to keep bowing. Finally, he gave each of us a Dharma name. We all were given our own Dharma name, and then the ceremony began. That day, we all took refuge. Then that night, he came back to my house and we got to talk a little bit more.

As time went on, I started thinking as I observed the Sangha and I realized the kind of life they lived. They had become vegetarians, ate only one meal a day before noon, and worked hard, didn't touch money, and gave up everything. I admired them so much. I thought, "I am already 40 and not young anymore; so what role can I play to support the assembly?" It took me about six months to figure out what I should be. I was already happily married and had two kids that were still teenagers and not grown up yet. I felt that I couldn't be like the Sangha and leave the home life. I thought really hard on this and realized that I could be a good Dharma protector. At that time, I made a vow that I would try my best in every way to be a good Dharma protector. After a couple of months, I thought since we now have an abbot, we should have an official temple, a place for him to teach us. We cannot just have him casually in my home. A few of my friends and I then looked around for a place and that was how we started the first Gold Wheel Monastery.

At the first Gold Wheel Monastery, more and more people came. As soon as we started Gold Wheel Monastery, Shifu brought Dharma Masters Heng Sure and Heng Chao, and they started the Three Steps, One Bow Pilgrimage from Gold Wheel. There is a book about their experiences on the Three Steps, One Bow Pilgrimage. In the very first picture of the book, you can see both of them bowing in front of Gold Wheel Monastery. The man by the door was my husband. In 1976, they began the Three Steps, One Bow Pilgrimage and I arranged deliveries of their food and everything to take care of them.

One of you asked me what kind of Dharma door you should choose to cultivate. There are 84,000 Dharma doors and this is stated very

所有人。那是九十年代夏季非常炎熱的一天，早期並沒有空調，而師父想把最好的棒喝在我們身上。我們不是傳統的佛教徒，對一切都不理解。我們只是一群想皈依的人，很多人還比我年輕，其中多數從未拜過佛。首先，師父讓我們以拜佛開始儀式，三個小時過去了，我們還是在拜佛，大家面面相覷、毫無頭緒。這到底在做什麼？當引磬叮地一響，我們就拜下去。我們開始覺得熱，有的人已經吃不消。之後我才明白，師父知道我們有很重的業障和壞習氣，要成為他的弟子，我們必須藉著拜佛消掉一些業障。最後他給我們法名，每個人都有自己的法名。然後皈依儀式開始了，當天我們都皈依了。當晚他回到我家，我們有機會說一點話。

隨著時間流逝，我開始思考，因為我有機會親近僧眾，了解他們的生活。他們成為素食者、日中一食、勤奮工作、不碰金錢、放下一切，讓我非常欽佩。我琢磨著，我四十歲，也不年輕，能以什麼身分來護持大眾？我大概花了長達半年的時間才為自己定位。我有一個美滿的婚姻，兩個未成年的孩子，我覺得自己不能出家。我認真思考，覺得自己可以做一個好護法來護持道場。幾個月後，我想我們有方丈，應該要有一個正規的道場，一個可以讓師父教導我們的地方。我們不能每次都隨隨便便地讓師父在我家。我和幾個朋友開始四處看地，這就是我們在洛杉磯建立第一個金輪寺的因緣。

第一個金輪寺成立後，越來越多的信眾來道場。金輪寺甫建立，師父就帶恒實法師與恒朝法師來，讓他們從金輪寺開始三步一拜。有一本書是有關他們三步一拜的經驗。書中的第一張照片就是他們倆在金輪寺門口拜佛，站在門邊的男眾就是我的丈夫。1976年，他們開始三步一拜，我負責提供他們食物、一切所需並照顧他們。

有人問我應當選擇什麼法門來修

clearly in the sutras, in every way you can achieve Buddhahood. It's up to you, your own conditions, your own affinities, and your own preferences. In the beginning, you have to find something to enjoy and do. Later you won't feel bored too much or back away from it. The more you do, the more you accomplish, and then you'll achieve happiness through your practice. Dharma will really give you happiness. You will also gain wisdom too. A lot of times, in your mind, you have things coming out and you don't know where they come from. They are from your own wisdom, your own cultivation; for our original true wisdom comes through bit by bit; gradually we gain all of this. The more you gain, the more you want to increase your cultivation. Because you know by doing that, you will get smarter. Through cultivation, you will see lots of things, understand more things, and then increase your own homework.

In the beginning, I began with the Great Compassion Mantra. Next, I started reciting sutras. Then back in 1983, during the very first session of the 10,000 Buddhas Repentance at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, I started bowing it as another homework. That took about forty days to finish. I started bowing it in 1983 up until a year and a half ago when I stopped because of my health. I bowed the 10,000 Buddhas Repentance everyday. I bowed 100 per hour for the ceremony. I finished 62 sections of the 10,000 Buddhas Repentance every day. I kept going for thirty something years. Actually, I am a very lazy person. I said that I wanted to bow every day 100 bows until the day my legs can not hold me up anymore. That's the kind of vow I made. In the beginning, it was difficult. For thirty years, I kept on. Once I broke my leg, I was in a cast and still bowing. I was a little bit younger then and had more energy.

I started bowing the 10,000 Buddhas and remembered Marty, the former Heng Chau. One time in a lecture, he talked about why he chose to bow. He chose to bow because we are about the same, we are all very arrogant, very self-righteous, we always wanted to be number one and think we are always the best. We also do not listen to people. By bowing, we not only repent of all the wrong things we did throughout this lifetime and past lives, but also at the same time developing ourselves and thus being more compassionate toward ourselves too. Bowing has been a wonderful experience for me. After I heard this from Marty, when I bow, I think it is wonderful. It's not just physical, but mental, and it builds my character.

行。經典中明確指出有八萬四千法門，每一個法門都可以幫助你成佛，決定在於你自己、你的因緣、你的喜好。只要一開始，找到自己喜歡修行的法們，修行的過程中就不會覺得煩，覺得多，然後放棄。你修得越多，就越有成就，你會從修行中得到法喜。佛法會帶給你喜悅，也會讓你得到智慧。很多時候，你的心裡浮現一些念頭，你並不知它們從何而來，它們是從你的智慧而來，從你的修行而來。修行會讓我們本有的智慧逐漸顯現。你獲得的智慧越多，就越想要精進修行。因為你知道，那麼做你會變得更聰明。通過修行，你會看到更多，理解更多，自然會增加自己的功課。

剛開始，我持大悲咒，後來開始念經。1983年，萬佛城首次舉行萬佛寶懺期間，我開始將萬佛寶懺作為另一項功課，大概花了四十天才圓滿。我從1983年開始拜佛，直到一年半之前，由於健康原因，不得不停止。我每天都拜萬佛寶懺，每小時拜100拜，每天可以完成萬佛寶懺的62個段落。我這樣持續了三十多年。其實我很懶惰，但是我發願每天拜100拜直到我的腿使不上力。剛開始並不容易，但是我堅持了三十年。有一次摔斷了腿，綁著石膏繃帶，我依然堅持拜。不過那時我還年輕，也有較多的體力。

拜萬佛寶懺的時候，我想起馬丁，就是前恆朝法師。有一次在講經的時候，他提到自己為何選擇拜佛。他選擇拜佛，是因為我們都非常我慢、貢高、總想爭第一、總覺得自己最好、也不聽取別人的意見。藉由拜佛，我們不僅懺悔今生和過去生所做的壞事，同時也幫助自我成長，增長慈悲心。拜佛，對我而言是一個很棒的體驗。聽了馬丁所言，拜佛的時候，我也覺得很棒。不只是體能上，更是精神上的修行，也塑造了我的品格。

☯待續

☯To be continued