



Faith, Vows and Practice

信、願、行

A Dharma Talk by Dharma Master Heng Shun at the Buddha Hall of the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas on March 27, 2024
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I'm going to talk about faith, vows, and practice.

I was thinking about how fortunate we are to study under our teacher. Although the Venerable Master is not here physically, we still have his Dharma. It's so hard to find someone like the Master who is truly enlightened, especially now in the modern world.

When I first became a Buddhist about fifty years ago, I was literally trying to search the world for a teacher like the Master. I went to Thailand and Burma in my search. It's so hard to find a teacher like the Master.

Even though he's not physically present, we still get to hear his teaching like we heard just now from his taped lectures on "the Ten Grounds" Chapter of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* in which he explained what the Dhyana States of Meditation are like. We are very fortunate to still be able to study his teachings.

I was also thinking about how hard it is to find a good place to cultivate, a place like the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas (CTTB). Most of us have been here for a while, and take it for granted. However, it's truly amazing. I remember around fifteen years ago, there was a Canadian monk (of European descent), whose teacher was a Tibetan teacher.

我想與大家分享一些關於信、願、行的體會。

我心中常感到，我們能夠跟隨上人修學，是多麼的幸運。雖然上人的色身已不住世，但我們依然有他的法可以遵循。尤其是在現代的世界裏，要找到像上人這樣真正開悟的明師是很難。

大約在50年前，我剛剛成為一名佛教徒時，我確實想在世界各地尋找像上人這樣的明師。我曾經去泰國和緬甸，四處尋師，但真的很難找到像上人這樣的老師。雖然他的肉身不在，但我們仍然可以聆聽到他的教導，就像我們剛才聽到他在《華嚴經·十地品》的講法錄音，他對禪定境界的講解一樣。我們真的非常幸運，能夠繼續修學他的教法。

我也在想，要找到一個適合修行的好地方，比如萬佛聖城這樣的勝處，是多麼不容易。我們大多數人已經在這裏住了一段時間，並習以為常，但其實這真的是相當殊勝。

He was originally ordained as bhikshu in Taiwan in accordance with his teacher's instructions. He then traveled to all of these different places throughout the world to find the best place to cultivate.

He ended up coming here for several weeks to a month. He told me that of all the places he visited, the CTTB was the best place for someone like him who really wanted to cultivate. He was pretty young—probably thirty years old or so.

He actually got permission from his Tibetan teacher, who had escaped from Tibet and started a monastery in Canada, to stay here at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas.

He was so happy. He was going to spend the rest of his life cultivating here at the City. However, his teacher then told him that he wanted him to go to India, where the Tibetan community was located in northern India. The Dalai Lama lived there in exile. His teacher said, "I want you first to learn Tibetan." So he left and unfortunately never came back.

I think his teacher purposely did that, knowing it would take several years to study Tibetan. Then, it was very difficult to come back here, so I never heard from him again.

My point is that it is an incredible opportunity to be able to cultivate here at CTTB, especially in this day and age.

I was at Gold Mountain Monastery for seventeen years and now I've been here at CTTB for over thirty years. I think being here so wonderful. We have ceremonies and sessions together. We have so many opportunities to work and practice every day. Everybody here really wants to cultivate.

The Master said we should never take the conditions we have here at CTTB lightly. We must have created much good karma past lives for this to come to fruition.

Faith

Speaking of faith, vows, and practice, this is based on what I learned from the Master's teachings. He said that the most important thing with faith is that you truly believe that the Land of Ultimate Bliss of Amitabha Buddha is real.

記得大約15年前，有一位加拿大比丘（歐洲裔），他的師父是一位西藏的上師。最初他是按照他的上師指示，到臺灣受戒成為比丘。之後，他走遍了世界各地，想尋找一個最適合修行的地方。最終，他來到了萬佛聖城，並在這裏住了將近一個月的時間。他告訴我，在他造訪的所有地方中，萬佛聖城對他這樣真心想修行的人來說是最好的地方。當時他還很年輕，約莫30歲左右。

他留在萬佛聖城，其實是得到了他的藏傳上師的允許。他的上師曾從西藏逃亡，並在加拿大建立了一座寺院。他非常高興，並計劃著將一生都奉獻於聖城修行。然而，他的上師隨後告訴他，想讓他去印度北部一個藏族社區所在的地方。達賴喇嘛當年流亡期間曾住在那裏。他的上師說：「我希望你先學習藏文。」於是他離開了聖城，但很遺憾的是，他再也沒有回來。

我認為他的上師是有意這樣安排的，因為知道學習藏文需要好幾年的時間，那幾年過後，再想回到聖城這裏就會變得很難，因此，我也沒有再聽到他的消息了。

我想說的是，在當今這個時代，能夠在萬佛聖城這裏修行，真的是一個難能可貴的機會。我曾在金山寺住了17年，而今也在萬佛聖城住了30多年。我認為在這裏生活非常殊勝。我們有法會和共修，每天也有許多機會一起出坡和修行。在這裏，大家都真心想修行。上人曾說，我們絕對不應輕視萬佛聖城的修行因緣。我們一定是累積了許多過去世的善業，才能有這樣的碩果。

信心

談到信、願、行，這些都是我從上人的教導中學到的。上人說，「信」的最重要之處在於，我們要真正相信阿彌陀佛的極樂世界是真實存在的，它和我們在世間上所經歷的一切是一樣真實。並且「信」的第二個層面，上人教導我們要有信心，要相信自己是可往生到極樂世界的。

這讓我想起我第一次跟隨上人學習的時候，那是在1974年。當時萬佛聖城還沒有購買，我們只有位於舊金山第15街的金山寺。其實我是1974年6月直接從泰國來到金山寺；雖然我在泰國已經出家是個沙彌，但初到金山寺時，我已不是沙彌了。在泰國，規矩是這樣的，一旦你出家了，

It's just as real as anything else we experience in the world. And the second aspect of faith that the Master would teach is that you have faith that you yourself can be reborn there. Now, this reminds me of when I first came study with the Master in 1974.

The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas didn't exist then. We only had a Gold Mountain Monastery on 15th Street in San Francisco. I actually came in June of 1974, directly from Thailand.

Although I became a novice in Thailand, I was no longer a novice when I came to Gold Mountain. In Thailand, the rule was that once you become a monastic you had to stay with your teacher for five years to learn how to become a proper Buddhist monk. One cannot just leave one's teacher without first undergoing five years of training with him.

So, I had to disrobe. At the time I disrobed and I also formally became an eight-precepted layperson. When I first came to Gold Mountain Monastery, I only stayed for one week. At that time, I felt things were too difficult, so I went back to Chicago. However, I came back in August 1974.

I still remember how hard it was during my first year. Gold Mountain was a converted mattress factory. The walls were made of dingy grey colored bricks. At the time, I felt that it was a horrible environment. Actually it was a really good environment for cultivating. We did the best we could to make it a monastery.

I remember that first year I was there. I had studied the Theravada tradition for over four years and, as previously mentioned, had just been a novice in Thailand. And now I was supposed to have faith that I could become a Buddha? So, it was difficult for me during the first year at Gold Mountain. When I came in August 1974, the Master was lecturing on the beginning of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. It was Chapter three, which is entitled, "Samantabhadra's Samadhi Chapter."

I was hearing the Master lecture eight times a week and listening to all of these incredible states of the *Avatamsaka*. Coming from the Small Vehicle, I'm thinking, "How can I become a Buddha? Are you really serious?" Thus it was hard to orient myself to these incredible states of the Buddhas as described in the *Avatamsaka*.

However, after an entire year of listening to the Master's instructions every day and I was also doing the Great Compassion Repentance once a week on Saturdays, things changed and it wasn't so difficult anymore. At that time, during the first year I was at Gold Mountain Monastery, we only did the Great Compassion Repentance (in Chinese) once a week. We also did the Medicine Master Repentance in English once a month.

你必須在師父身邊修學五年，學習如何成為一名合格的佛教比丘；在這五年的學習期滿之前，不得隨意離開師父。

因此，我不得不還俗。那時我還俗，我也正式成為八戒（受持八關齋戒）居士。當我第一次來到金山寺的時候，只待了一週。那時，我感覺這裏的生活實在太艱難了，所以我回到了芝加哥。然而，我在1974年8月就回來了。

我仍然記得在金山寺的第一年有多麼不容易。金山寺是由一家床墊工廠改建而成的，牆壁是用灰暗的磚塊砌成，我當時覺得這裏的環境看起來非常糟糕。然而，事實上，這裏是一個非常適合修行的環境。我們盡了最大的努力，將它改造成一座寺院。

我記得剛到那裏的第一年，因為我曾在上座部佛教學習超過四年，並且如前所述，我也曾在泰國出家為沙彌。現在，我卻要相信自己是成佛？所以在金山寺的第一年對我來說是非常困難的。1974年8月我回到金山寺的時候，上人正在講述《華嚴經》的開頭部分，那是第三品，經名為〈普賢三昧品〉。我每週聆聽上人講經有八講，聽到《華嚴經》中那些不可思議的境界。從小乘的背景來看，我心想：「我怎麼可能成佛？你是說真的嗎？」因此，初到金山寺的第一年，面對《華嚴經》所描述的諸佛不可思議境界，我感到非常困惑，也難以適應。

然而，經過整整一年，每天聆聽上人的教導，以及每週六參加一次〈大悲懺〉的修持，一切開始改變，生活也不再那麼艱難了。那時，在金山寺的第一年，我們每週只拜一次〈大悲懺〉（以中文進行）；此外，每個月也用英文拜一次〈藥師懺〉。因此，信心有時確實會是一種挑戰，但如果有一位善知識的指導，就能克服信心不足的

Therefore, having faith can sometimes be a struggle, but if you have a good teacher, you can overcome not having enough faith

Now, regarding having faith, my students ask me now, “How can we become Buddhas? It takes many millions of lifetimes to become a Buddha.” When listening to the Master’s lectures on the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, I really delved into Chapter 17, “The Merit and Virtue from First Bringing Forth the Bodhi Mind.”

I tell my students that in that chapter it teaches that once you reach the first level of enlightenment of the forty-one levels on the Bodhisattva Path (the first level is called “First Bringing Forth the Bodhi-mind”) you’re irreversible from becoming a Buddha. You are 100% guaranteed to eventually become a Buddha. At that stage, you’ve already eliminated a tremendous amount of difficulty and suffering. Therefore, it is much easier for the Bodhisattva at that level, to follow the path, even though one might have many more lifetimes before becoming a Buddha.

Vows

Next is vows. I remember the Master instructing us that it’s really important to make your vows when you first wake up in the morning. This is something I’ve done for many decades.

Every morning, I make my vows. The Master taught us, “You make your vows in the morning, and you evaluate how you did in the evening.” Of course, the most important vow for us is to be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss in our next life. That is very important.

As I mentioned in a lecture I gave a while ago, I was talking to Bogdan (Professor R. Bogdan Staszewski) from Poland, who had just given a lecture for DRBU about quantum mechanics and the quantum realm. He himself really believes in the Pure Land and wants to be reborn there. He said, “I don’t know if you become a Buddha in the Land of Ultimate Bliss or go to another world later.” I just explained to him what was taught in “Chapter on the Practices and Vows of Samantabhadra” (Chapter 40 of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*).

In my previous lecture, I talked about how I have two very intelligent friends who are not Buddhists.

One has been a lawyer for over thirty years and the other one has been a Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT) for over forty years. They’re both, like me, in their seventies. Earlier last year they criticized me for wanting to be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. They said, “What are you going to do? Just sit there, cultivate, become a Buddha? What about other living

問題。

關於信心，我的學生現在會問我：「我們怎麼可能成佛？成佛需要經歷百千萬劫。」當我聽上人講解《華嚴經》時，我特別研讀了第十七品〈初發心功德品〉。我告訴學生們，在這一品中，講到當你一旦達到菩薩四十一個階位中的第一階位——「初發心位」時，你就已經不退轉，最終成佛是百分之百的確定。到了那個階段，你已經消除了巨大的困難和苦惱。

因此，對於處於這個階位的菩薩而言，即使可能還需要經歷許多劫才能成佛，但沿著這條道路前進就容易得多。

願力

接下來是願力。我記得上人教導我們，在每天早晨剛起床時立願是非常重要的。這是我數十年來一直堅持的修行。每天早晨，我都會發願。上人教導我們：「早晨發願，晚上反省。」當然，對我們來說，最重要的發願就是能往生到阿彌陀佛的極樂世界，這是非常重要的。

正如我之前在一次講演中提到的，我曾與一位名叫波格丹的波蘭教授交流。他剛為法界佛教大學做了一場關於量子力學和量子領域的講座。他自己非常相信極樂世界，並希望能往生極樂淨土。他對我說：「我不知道是否在極樂世界成佛，還是會到另一個世界去。」我向他解釋了《華嚴經》第四十品〈普賢行願品〉中所教導的內容。

在之前的演講中，我還提到過兩位非常聰明的朋友，他們都不是佛教徒。

其中一位從事律師工作超過30年，另一位則是婚姻與家庭治療師(MFT)已有40多年。他們和我一樣，現在都70多歲了。去年，他們曾批評我為何想往生極樂世界。他們說：「你要做什麼？坐在那裏修行，就成佛了？那其他眾生呢？難道你不想幫助人們、幫助眾生嗎？」所以我告訴他們，就像我之前告訴波格丹一

beings? Don't you want to help people, help living beings?" So I told them, as I also told Bogdan, that according to the "Practices and Vows of Samantabhadra," it says very clearly that once you're reborn there, after a certain period of time, (you don't know how long it will be), you will receive a "prediction" from the Buddha that you will definitely become a Buddha in the future. Once you have received that prediction, you can literally go to all the worlds throughout the universe, helping living beings. The Pure Land is like your sort of "base of operations."

Therefore, you're not abandoning living beings. You're still helping living beings for incredibly long periods of time, and in incredible numbers of worlds. Then the chapter says that you will eventually become a Buddha in some other world. So, I was able to counteract the criticism of my good friends. Also, Bogdan was quite delighted to hear this teaching which he had never heard before.

Practice

In terms of practice. I remember the Master rarely telling people what to practice. In my many years of studying with him for over twenty years, I myself only asked him once.

I said, "Shifu, is it all right if I do this particular practice?" I asked about memorizing a particular sutra. And the Master said, "Whatever method (Buddha-dharma) you do, as long as you practice it with utmost sincerity, stay with it, and you focus on one method (he said in Chinese: 一門深入 "deeply enter one Dharma-door"), then you'll be successful."

To end, I just want to quote some things the Master said about being here at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. These are quotes by the Master from notes I took back in 1992.

He said, "In the whole world, only the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas is so pure. Other places have afflictions. In other places people gossip and talk about people's rights and wrongs. Whereas here in the City, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas are always mindful and protective here. And if you bring forth the Bodhi mind, they'll help you." That's one quote.

In the other quote, the Master said, "Everything at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas is good. You have food, clothes, and a place to live. Everything is good! You really should cultivate the path. If you still don't cultivate well, even if you're in the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha, you won't cultivate, so this is the best place. So what are you waiting for? Cultivate now!" Amitabha. ❀

樣，根據〈普賢行願品〉的教導，它非常明確地說，一旦你往生到極樂世界後，經過一段時間（你無法知道是多長時間），你會從佛那裏得到一個「授記」，預示你未來必定成佛。一旦得到這個授記，你便能遍遊宇宙中無量的世界，廣度眾生。極樂淨土就像是你的一個「運行基地」。

因此，這並不是拋棄眾生，而是你仍然在極長的時間裏，在無數的世界中幫助無量的眾生。接著，經文中提到，你最終會在某個世界成佛。所以，我能夠回應兩位好朋友的批評。此外，波格丹聽到這個他從未聽過的教法時，也感到非常歡喜。

行持

就行持來說，我記得上人很少直接告訴我們應該修持什麼法門。在我跟隨上人修學的20多年裏，我自己只向上人請教過一次。我問他：「師父，我修這個特定的法門可以嗎？」當時我詢問的是背誦某部經典的事。上人回答說：「任何修行的方法（佛法），只要你用最真誠的心去行持，專注於一門，並持之以恆，（他用中文說：一門深入），你就會成功。」

最後，我想引用一些上人關於萬佛聖城的教誨。這些是我在1992年記下的筆記中的內容。師父說：

「在全世界，只有萬佛聖城是那麼清淨，其他地方都是煩惱。在其他地方，人都歡喜議論是非，談論別人的對錯。然而在萬佛城，諸佛菩薩時時護念這裏，如果你發菩提心，他們就會幫助你。」

這是其中一段話。上人還說過：

「萬佛聖城的一切都很好。你有吃的，有穿的，也有住的地方，一切都很好！你真的應該用心修道。如果你在這裏還不能好好修行，即使你到了阿彌陀佛的淨土，你也不會好好修行。所以這裏是最好的地方。那你還在等什麼？現在就修行吧！」南無阿彌陀佛。 ❀