

# The Dharma Door of Listening Sutra Lectures

## 聽經法門

A Dharma Talk by Bhikshuni Heng Ching at the Buddha Hall of the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas on October 1, 2024

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This is Heng Ching. It is probably my cause and condition, coincidentally, I dreamt of the Venerable Master speaking the Dharma last night. So I would like to share with everyone some of my experiences reciting and listening to the sutras. When I left home life, I didn't know Chinese, which was very frustrating.

Not long later, I heard the story of the Master Gunabhadra. (You can find his story in the lectures during the 100-day Chan session, also in *Records of the High Sanghans*). Dharma Master Gunabhadra was from India. He traveled around propagating the Buddhadharma. Later, he saw that the conditions of Mahayana in China had ripened and decided to come to China to propagate the Dharma. He and a group of people took a large boat to China, but according to the Master's explanation, on the way, they hit a small island in the middle of the sea. They got stuck there, and many people there were afraid that they were going to die. But Dharma Master Gunabhadra encouraged everyone to recite Guanyin Bodhisattva's name and said they should pray to Guanyin Bodhisattva for help. After praying for a while, Guanyin Bodhisattva was moved, and

我是恒青。也可以說是因緣，我昨天晚上湊巧夢見上人在講法。所以我就跟大家分享一些我誦經，還有聽經的經歷。我剛出家時，因為聽不懂中文，感到非常沮喪。

不久以後我聽到上人講功德賢法師（求那跋陀羅法師）的故事，這是在《百日禪》系列的《高僧傳》裏面可以找到的。功德賢法師來自印度，他四處弘揚佛法。後來，他觀察到當時中國大乘佛法的因緣成熟，便決定前往弘法。他與一群人乘坐一艘大船前往中國。根據上人的講解，在途中，他們的船撞上了一座位於海中的小島後就無法前進。所有的人被困在那裏，許多人感到恐慌，擔心自己會喪命。於是功德賢法師鼓勵大家一起稱念觀音菩薩聖號，並祈求觀音菩薩的幫助。大家念觀音聖號一段時間後，感動了觀音菩薩，觀音菩薩隨即降下甘露法雨。雨水使海面水位上升，他們的船因此得以脫困，最終順利抵達中國。

抵達中國後，時任宰相是一位虔誠的佛教徒，他非常敬重功德賢法師。宰相請求功德賢法師為大家講解《華嚴經》，但功德賢法師不懂中文，他只會幾個簡單的詞彙，根本無法用這幾些中文來講經。對於自己的語言障礙，功德賢法師感到非常沮喪，於是日夜拜懺，開始向諸佛菩薩虔誠祈求幫助。

一年後，有一次他在定中，看到一位身穿白袍的人

so sweet dew poured down rain. The rain increased the water level, and their boat was unstuck from the island. They then were able to arrive in China smoothly.

After arriving, the Chinese prime minister, who was Buddhist, really respected Master Gunabhadra. The prime minister asked him to lecture on the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, but Master Gunabhadra didn't know Chinese. He knew only a few words, which were insufficient to teach the sutras. He was very frustrated with his language limitation and began bowing in repentance day and night, praying to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for help.

After one year, in a Samadhi state, he saw somebody dressed in a white robe come and hold a head in one hand. The person asked him, "Do you have anything that is troubling you?" Master Gunabhadra said, "Yes, I do. My hope is to propagate the Buddhadharma here, but I can't speak Chinese. I have this language barrier."

The person in white robe said, "Well, I can switch your head. Once I do so, you can speak Chinese. Are you willing to do this?" Master Gunabhadra agreed to it. In his Samadhi state, the person switched his head. When he got out of Samadhi, he was able to speak Chinese and smoothly propagated the *Avatamsaka Sutra*.

In terms of learning a language, you can break it up into two parts. One is listening and speaking, and the other part is reading and writing. They go hand in hand. My experience of being able to recognize Chinese characters is quite similar to many other people's. At that time, when we recited the *Avatamsaka Sutra* in the morning from 7 a.m. to 8 a.m., we actually didn't have phonetics in addition to the sutra; we only had the Chinese characters. The Dharma master who was taking care of my group instructed the young novice next to me to point to every single character as we recited the sutra.

I asked the Dharma master, "What use would this be? I don't know the characters and can't read or pronounce them." But she said that I still had to look at the characters anyway. In the beginning, I refused to look at the characters because I thought it would be useless, but then I felt bad after a while because the novice next to me was very obedient and would



向他走來。這個白袍人手拿著一個頭，白袍人問功德賢法師：「你是否有什麼困擾？」法師回答說：「我的願望是能夠在這裏弘揚佛法，但我卻不會說中文，語言成為了我的障礙。」

白衣人說：「我可以給你換一個頭，這樣一來，你便能說中文了。你願意嗎？」功德賢尊者答應了。在他的三昧定中，白衣人換下了他的頭。當他出定後，他果然能說出流利的中文，並順利弘揚《華嚴經》。

在學習語言方面，可以分為兩個部分：一是聽說，二是讀寫。這兩者相輔相成。我的學習過程中，識字的經驗其實與許多人的經歷相似。當時，我們每天早上七點到八點誦《華嚴經》，誦經時的經文並沒有附加的注音，只有純粹的漢字。負責我們小組的法師特別叮囑旁邊的小沙彌尼，在誦經時，用手指著每一個字。

當時我問法師說：「這有什麼用呢？我根本不認識漢字，也不會讀，更不會念。」但法師告訴我說，還是要練習去看那些文字。剛開始，我拒絕讀那些漢字，因為覺得完全沒用。然而，過了一段時間，我心裏覺得很過意不去，因為旁邊的那位沙彌尼非常聽話，整整一個小時的誦經時間裏，她都會耐心地用手指著每一個字。

於是，我開始試著去看那些漢字。慢慢地，我能認出一個字、兩個字，然後越來越多，直到最後，我能認出〈普賢行願



point to every character for the entire hour of sutra recitation.

So, I started to look at the characters. After a while, I was able to recognize one character or two and then many others until I was able to recognize all the characters in the “Samantabhadra Bodhisattva’s Conduct and Vows” chapter. Yet this experience of my recognizing and knowing Chinese characters is similar to that of many nuns and lay people who did not know Chinese and who learned the characters from sutra recitation.

But how is it that in three to four months after leaving home life, I was able to understand 90% to 100% of Chinese? This is related to my experiences listening to the Sutra lectures. As we know, there are many miraculous, inconceivable, and wondrous benefits from listening to the Sutra lectures. The Master said that actually, from listening to the Sutra lectures, we can increase our good roots, open our wisdom, not retreat from our Bodhi resolve, and gain many other benefits.

Many people are familiar with this story about one of the Master Hua’s old disciples in Hong Kong. She was in her 60s, and she was deaf. Although she couldn’t hear anything, she would go listen to the Master’s lecture on the Sutras every day. She would climb all the stairs to the monastery. In any harsh weather, she would always go listen to the sutra lectures, even though she couldn’t hear anything.

Then, one day, she was able to hear things. The Master said this was because she was extremely sincere. This was her response to listening to the Sutras.

I really like listening to the Venerable Master’s explanation of the Sutras. To be exact, you can say that I actually like to listen to the Master talk. It doesn’t matter what he speaks, whether it is Sutra lectures, Dharma talks, or stories; I always like to listen to whatever he says. I always thought that they were so great and wonderful. When I was at Girls’ school—this was before I was a nun—sometimes, the Master would give talks in the afternoon.

The principal at that time, Terry Nicholson, would announce to the school, “Oh, the Master is going to give a talk this afternoon. If you want to go, you can go.” Sometimes, teachers would bring the whole class to listen to the Master lecture. Other times, I would go by myself, and because I was in elementary school, I got off school early. I would run to the Buddha Hall to listen to the Master speak.

I would sit in the back, but I didn’t understand anything. I couldn’t even understand the translation in English, perhaps because of the terms they used or because the Dharma principles

品》裏的所有字。這種透過誦經認識並學會漢字的經歷，其實和許多不懂中文的比丘尼或居士的經驗相似，他們也是從誦經中學會認字的。

那麼我是怎麼能在出家後的三到四個月內，就能理解90%到100%的中文呢？這與我聽經的經驗密切相關。我們都知道，聽經有許多不可思議、奇妙的功德利益。上人曾說，聽經不僅能增長善根、開啟智慧、不退菩提心，還能得到許多其他的利益。

許多人都聽說過上人的一位老弟子的故事。這位弟子在香港，六十多歲時已經耳聾。儘管她什麼也聽不見，但她每天都去聽上人講經。她會努力地攀爬階梯到寺院；不管天氣多麼惡劣，她都堅持去聽經，即使她什麼也聽不見。

有一天，她突然聽到了聲音！上人說，這是她聽經後的感應，因為她非常誠心。

我非常喜歡聽上人講經。如果要說得更準確些，可以說我非常喜歡聽上人說話。無論是講經、開示，還是講故事，我都喜歡聽。我總覺得上人說的每一句話都特別精彩和美妙。在我還未出家時，有時候上人下午會在女校講法。

當時的校長易果參會向全校宣布：「哦，今天下午上人要講話了。如果有人想去，可以去。」有時候，老師會帶全班學生去聽師父講話。有時候我會自己去。

由於我當時還在上小學，放學早。我就會自己跑到佛殿去聽上人講話。我坐在後排，但完全聽不懂上人講的話，因為我不懂中文，甚至連翻譯成英文的內容我也聽不懂，也許是因為用的佛教術語或者講法的內容太深奧。無論如何，我什麼都聽不懂。

但我仍然會坐在佛殿的後排，因為我特別喜歡聽上人說話。每次上人講完經後，大眾都會向上人頂禮。在我們頂禮時，上人就會離開大殿。

were hard for me to comprehend. In any case, I didn't understand anything. But I just sat in the back row of the Buddha hall because I really liked to listen to the Master speak. Every time the Master finished his lecture, the assembly would bow to him. As we were bowing, he would leave the hall. I would bow on the first cushion on my row so I could bow close to the aisle. My teacher told me that since the Master is a sage, his feet wouldn't touch the ground when he walked. I really wanted to see how far from the ground his feet would be. But of course, as we know, we can't actually see this with our flesh eyes. Later, when I left home life, I still couldn't understand Chinese at all, especially the Sutra lectures. However, one day, I was in the Buddha Hall listening to the Sutra lecture; I believe we were listening to the *Avatamsaka Sutra*.

I was daydreaming because I couldn't understand Chinese or English. It was just too advanced for me, I guess. I sat there looking at Guanyin Bodhisattva. Then, all of a sudden, I felt this sensation in my left ear. The feeling is when you climb a high mountain and the altitude compresses your ear, so you can't actually hear anything, and when you go down, your ear opens up. It was that kind of feeling.

I felt my left ear opened up. All of a sudden, I was able to understand everything in Chinese. I had a false thought at that moment. I said to the Master in my head, "Oh, Shifu, I can finally understand you!" I was very happy. I wasn't vigorous like Dharma Master Gunabhadra, who prayed to be able to speak the Dharma in Chinese, and I wasn't sincere like the Master's other disciple, who was deaf. But this was my experience of suddenly being able to understand Chinese. Of course, when we're studying, listening, or reciting sutras, it's not for the purpose of learning the Chinese language. But it's just an added benefit.

The Master said before that the *Shurangma Sutra's* wording is beautifully crafted and eloquent. So, if we want to learn Chinese well, we can study the *Shurangma Sutra*. Even people who know Chinese could greatly improve their Chinese by doing so.

But we all know that the real purpose of listening to the Sutras is so that we can study the Buddha's principles, learn the Buddha's wisdom, and use it in our daily life to cultivate. In the preface commentary of the *Shurangma Sutra*, the Master explained that all Buddhas, for the sake of one great matter, appear in the world, which is **"to reveal, understand, and enter into the Buddha's wisdom."** It is for the purpose of teaching living beings how we can cultivate and end birth and death. ❀

我總是跪在我那排靠近過道的第一個拜墊上，因為我想趁機靠近過道頂禮。我聽老師說，上人是位聖人，走路時腳是不會沾地的。我非常想看看上人的腳離地有多高。但當然，我們都知道，這是用肉眼看不到的。

後來，我出家了，卻依然聽不懂中文，尤其是經典講解。然而有一天，我在佛殿聽經講解，我記得當時講的是《華嚴經》。我因為聽不懂中文或英文而在發呆，這些內容對我來說太深奧了。我就那樣坐著凝視觀音菩薩。忽然之間，我感覺左耳有一種奇特的感覺。那種感覺就像是爬到高山上，由於海拔壓力讓耳朵閉塞，聽不到聲音；但當你下山時，耳朵突然打開了——就是這樣的一種感覺。我感覺我的左耳打開了。忽然之間，我竟然聽懂了所有的中文！在那一刻，我起了一個妄念，心裏對上人說：「哦，師父，我終於聽懂您講的話了！」我感到非常高興。我並不像功德賢法師那樣精進地發願要學會用中文說法，也不像上人的另一位聽不見的弟子那樣至誠懇切。但這就是我突然能聽懂中文的經歷。當然，我們在學習、聆聽或誦讀經典時，目的並不是為了學習中文語言。但這卻是一個額外的收穫。

上人曾說過，《楞嚴經》的文辭精美流暢，非常富有文采。所以，如果我們想學好中文，可以學習《楞嚴經》。即便是懂中文的人，透過研讀《楞嚴經》，也能大大提升自己的語文能力。

然而，我們都知道，真正聽經的目的，是為了學習佛陀的法義，學習佛陀的智慧，並將其運用到日常生活中來修行。在《楞嚴經》的序文注解中，上人曾解釋說，諸佛為一大事因緣而出現於世，就是為了「開示悟入佛之知見」。這是為了教化眾生，指引我們如何修行，如何了生脫死。 ❀