





# The Chant on Protecting and Transforming

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Dear Sangha,

Today is the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 1998 and we are in the New Hamlet. We are continuing the winter retreat in the spring retreat, and we are going to study The Chant on Protecting and Transforming. We need to have a new second body in the spring retreat. We should use our experience from the winter retreat in having a second body and take a step further in this practice so we can do it more deeply. We must master this practice, as the Dharma door of the second body is going to be a very important Dharma door, and we're going to share it with different Sanghas in other parts of the world. At the end of this retreat we will write a report about what we have learnt about our practice of the second body. We have to report on how we have been able to help our second body, and we also have to talk about our feelings about the benefits that have come to us from this practice and the difficulties we have been able to overcome, or avoid, thanks to this practice. It's a wonderful Dharma door and we need to succeed in its practice and therefore we should not practice according to the outer form, just saying I have a second body. If we do it only half-heartedly we will have nothing to report. Actually, we are not practicing in order to report, but we are practicing in order to have a deep experience, a direct experience of the benefits of the practice.

Secondly, we should learn more about how to hold meetings in the Sangha. We are still very bad at this - we have meetings that are too long and make people very tired. There are moments in the meetings that are stressful and tense; there is irritation and we lose the faith of people who are with us when we do that. Therefore, the Sangha must organize Dharma discussions in order to find out how meetings in the Sangha can be beneficial, can be a real practice with peace, joy, smiles and happiness, and without tension or lasting too long. Everybody should contribute to these Dharma discussions so that the quality of the meetings in the Sangha can be raised. How can we do that so that in these meetings there are no unkind or unbeneficial words spoken which pass back and forth between people. We need to have somebody who is able to bring the Sangha back to the real matter of the meeting, and whenever there is tension that person should know how to remove the tension otherwise it is harmful for our minds.

I remember in the past there was a gathering, before we had the Unified Buddhist Church we had the Vietnamese Congregation and in charge of that was a high monk. It was a very long meeting with the Congregation. He was the facilitator sitting at the bell from hour to hour with great dignity and he was listening to what everyone was saying, what every monk from the South, from the Center and from the North of Vietnam was saying. When the country of Vietnam was divided, then the monks made different congregations: in the South, in the Center and in the North. In addition there were also sections for the monks and those for the lay people. This meeting was very long and there were moments in the meeting when there was great tension, if you compare, you could say that they are not very different from meetings of Parliamentarians in the world - there was a lot of tension. I was, at that time, the editor of a certain Buddhist magazine, therefore I had to be there. I saw there was a lot of tension and the monk behind the bell did not intervene - he just sat there. He just had to say perhaps one word and the tension would go down straight away, or one sentence and the tension would go straight away because his virtue and dignity was very great.

When I was in India, I met the Premier of India and I gave him a couple of suggestions to be used in the National Assembly, because I heard people were fighting in the Assembly. I suggested a couple of things that the leader of the national assembly liked very much. The next day he established a committee to look into the ethics of the national assembly. One of the suggestions, which I gave, was that when they begin a meeting of the National Assembly, the Chairman should say, "*I have been asked to represent the assembly in asking you to be able to listen to each other so that our collective wisdom can bring about beneficial decisions. Therefore in today's meeting I ask you to practice deep listening and loving speech.*" The members of the assembly all belong to different spiritual traditions, but these words of advice can be accepted by any spiritual traditions. Whenever there is tension the Chairman can invite the bell for everybody to breathe, and when somebody stands up to express themselves in an unkind voice, then he can also invite the bell. The leader of the National Assembly liked that very much and said he would use this. So why don't we also use these suggestions in our own meetings, because in our meetings there is also tension. When the elder brothers and sisters have tension between them, the younger brothers and sisters feel very weary of this - they think the older brothers and sisters have practiced a long time but they still have tension between them.

At the beginning of the meeting, we have three sounds of the bell, and then we read something like this:

*Before the Buddha, before the ancestral teachers, we vow that today's meetings will take place in the spirit of harmony of views and harmony of thought. We will use loving speech and deep listening so that today's meeting will bring about beautiful results.*

These results are an offering we can give to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. We vow not to hold back in sharing our wisdom, but we also vow not to speak if we see that in us there is irritation. We are determined not to allow stress and tension to arise in the meeting, and if there is tension, we vow immediately to stop the meeting, to stand up and practice repentance in order to return the atmosphere of harmony of thought to the Sangha. Repeat these words:

*Lord Buddha, and teachers over many generations; we vow to go through this meeting today in the spirit of happy sharing. We will use loving speech and deep listening in order to bring about the success of the meeting as an offering to the Three Jewels. We vow not to hesitate to share our insight honestly, but will not say anything if the feeling of irritation and anger is present in us. We will not let tension come up during the meeting, and at the sign of such tension we will stop right away and begin anew so that it will be completely gone before we resume our meeting.*

We read this first and if necessary we read it a second time. At the time of the meeting we need somebody sitting at the bell - a bell-master, mindfulness master. During the meetings that person is asked by the community to have that responsibility, and they are supposed to stop the tension arising in the meeting. If tension does arise that person is responsible for dissolving it, for letting off the steam of the tension. Whenever there is tension that person should see it and should admit – yes, there is tension - breathing in, I know there is tension, breathing out I know there is tension. I know what I have to do to stop the tension because this is for the happiness of the Sangha. The result of a meeting is something we offer to Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and if all we have to offer is tension, what a pity for the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. If someone in the meeting feels there is tension, that person can stand up and say respectfully to the chairman of the meeting, *I feel there is tension in this meeting*. Anybody can do that; a novice who feels there is tension can stand up, join their palms and the mindfulness master has the duty to do something about that tension. If someone feels they have said something that has made tension, they should stand up straight away, prostrate and say:

*I prostrate to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. I have brought about tension, I am very sorry.*

And that will bring about harmony of thinking. Sometimes it is somebody who is not responsible for the tension, they can invite that other person to prostrate with them. The third method we could use - we can put a cushion for Thây in the meeting. Although Thây isn't there, we see that Thây is there and whenever we say something to the Sangha we always say "*respected teacher, respected Sangha*" - we talk as if Thây is there because Thây is in fact in every one of us. When we say "*respected Thây*" like that and we are aware that Thây is sitting with us and he is expecting us to speak in mindfulness, with loving speech and listen with mindfulness, then whatever we say will be with harmony of thought. This practice exists in our tradition already. In the Root Temple, my teacher used to sit at a table and whenever one of the disciples went past that table he would bow his head, whether our teacher was there



always used to sit. Nobody else wanted to sit there because that would be impolite, and when we went past that place we would bow our head and when two of us went past we always felt that our teacher was there, so what we said in that place was always mindful. So, in our meeting we can put a cushion for Thây as if Thây is there and when we come into the meeting we join our palms and bow our head towards that cushion and when we say something in the meeting we always say "*respected teacher, respected Sangha*". Later we will be able to do it without the outer sign, but to begin with we need the outer sign. This is a method we can use to raise the quality of our meetings in the Sangha.

As far as Shining Light is concerned, we have to shine the light on those who are preparing to become Dharmacharyas, and we also need to shine light on those who have already become Dharmacharyas. First of all, those practicing to become Dharmacharyas and then those who are already Dharmacharyas. The Shining Light method is very wonderful. It is a Dharma door which we offer to the Three Jewels and which we will hand on to future generations, so therefore we have to be successful. We have to do what we can; we have to shine the light with all our compassion and loving-kindness, with all our respect. We have to say everything we have seen about the person we are shining light on, with respect, with compassion, with love. We should see the person we are shining light on as ourselves. We haven't the right to hide what we have seen; we have to be sincere in saying what we have seen. This is not a matter of not sharing respect, but is a method of deep looking. We may need to take time from sitting meditation in order to look deeply, because sitting meditation and looking deeply are the same, and in a session of looking deeply we need the same seriousness as we have in meditation. We should sit, body and mind as one, our backs straight, not sitting in a sloppy way and we should shine light, sitting as straight as we do in sitting meditation and with all our heart. There are a number of lay people who need to have light shone on them because they are practicing to be Dharmacharyas. All those practicing to become Dharmacharyas have to begin, so that they can show us in the Summer Retreat that they are practicing to be Dharmacharyas. They really have to practice to show their capacities in the summer. There is an Order Of Inter-being member in the upper hamlet who has made a lot of transformation, and I would like that person, he is '*True Great Instrument*', to be practicing to be a Dharmacharya. I want him to be able to help people who come in the summer. When he first came to Plum Village he was not a good practitioner but while he's been here he's made a lot of progress; he's helped his family and he has said quite correctly that not necessarily every body in the Sangha loves him, but nobody hates him. I think it is true, everybody sees that, and he is very worthy to be a Dharmacharya, so therefore I suggest that he should begin practicing to learn to be a Dharmacharya. If monks and nuns can do as well as he does, then they are already doing very well.

We should practice our dharma doors with all our heart and straightaway. One day, I mentioned in a Dharma Talk the ways in which we can practice in the kitchen. It is a practice when it's our turn to cook for the Sangha. I suggested that when we go into the kitchen to practice in the morning, we should begin our time of working by lighting a stick of incense together. We should invite the bell before we bring out the carrots and the potatoes. I was very happy to hear that the day after I mentioned that point, two sisters did this straight away. Our Dharma doors are being practiced seriously in the New Hamlet, Lower Hamlet and Upper Hamlet.

With regards to the practice of the second body - we may have a second body who we feel is difficult to look after, because people who we think would be easy to look after have already been taken. The method of getting a second body is this - everybody says the name of the person they want to be their second body and at first there are many people to choose from, but as we go along there is only one person left, and we have to choose that person. We may feel that this person is very difficult to look after, but you should know that this is a wonderful chance for you, an opportunity. The person that you think would be difficult can bring us a great deal of benefit and joy in our practice. There are fruits that have thorns and are hard, but when we break them open, they taste very good. The monkeys know that - they break these hard-skinned fruits. There are people we see, who, from the outside are not very sweet. The way they talk is rather severe, but if we know how to deal with them, if we are able to open them up, then the fruit is very sweet - you must have seen people like this. Myself, I have seen there are people who are shy, withdrawing; they don't say anything, speak anything, but one day they react very strongly - that is because for a long time they wanted to say something but they haven't dared to say it. So we think that person may be very unkind and not at all gentle, but in fact, we can help that person become a very sweet spring of water, so don't be deceived by the outside - don't think that the second body is very difficult to look after. Bring all your ability to look after that person and that person will become a very sweet spring of water. Good luck.

So, protecting and transforming our practice is to guard the six organs of sense – eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and

mind - they are like six gates to a city. Do not allow the bandits to come into the city through those gates. The guards who stand at the gates of the city are mindfulness, because when we have mindfulness we are able to recognize what is coming in and going out. There are times we allow people in the gates, but if they are strangers then we should know what they are bringing in because they could invade our city. And we have released our city to them, so therefore we have to see the coming in and going out of the sounds and the images of the different mental formations. The practitioner who does not know how to guard the six senses, how can they practice and transform these things? There are things that are not as we would like them to be in our body and our mind - suffering, craving, anger, hatred and ignorance. We have to be able to transform these things into something more positive, so that is why we have this chant called "Protecting and Transforming"; we chant it to direct us in our practice. *"We your disciples who, from the beginning-less time, have made ourselves unhappy out of confusion and ignorance"*. This chant was written by me when I was 24 or 25 years old and after that the congregation of Vietnam put it in their daily liturgy and I changed it a little bit and made it into the chant we have here.

*"We your disciples who from beginning-less time"* means for so long - in fact, from time without beginning. In English we say non-beginning. It is to help us see about how Buddhism looks at time, because time does not have a beginning - there isn't a point zero in time, which afterwards has minute one, minute two, minute three. Time has no beginning because in the teachings of the Buddha, time is a manifestation. It is a phenomenon and every phenomenon depends on other phenomena in order to arise and manifest. If there is not space, there is not time. If there is not material, there is not time. The Buddha talks about the six elements - earth, water, fire, air, space, and consciousness, and in these six elements there is time, even though it's not mentioned as one of them it lies within them. The eight elements are earth, water, fire, air, space, time, consciousness, direction, and consciousness. For these eight elements, each one contains to the other seven - if you look into one, you will see the other seven. Matter is one of manifestation; therefore time is not a separate existing identity. This is true of the relativity theory of Albert Einstein-time and space are not two things, they are part of the same reality. They cannot be divided from each other - this is, because that is - so time and space are just ideas we have and they manifest and we see them and when we look into time, we see space. We say summer is time and space also. Now we are in winter, but if we go to Australia, where some monks and nuns are soon going, we will see that it is summer over there, so a season is time, but also space. Beginning-less time means we don't know when it began. It could be now; it could have been far away in the past, so this is the first time the beginning of time has been talked about in terms of interdependent arising.

*We, your disciples, who from beginning-less time have made ourselves unhappy out of confusion and ignorance.* The word "disciple" in Chinese means younger brother and child, so we are both the younger brother and sister and the child of the Buddha, so we have done things because of our speech, our body and our mind. These things have made obstacles in our life and we have done these things because we are ignorant, we don't know where we are going. We have made many mistakes that make us suffer and those around us suffer. We don't want to do these things, but because we are ignorant and confused we do them. We have wrong perceptions and that is why we do these things. *So we have been born and died with no direction so many times and now we have found confidence in the highest awakening.* Before the throne of the Buddha, and this awakened person is sitting on the throne and they have the highest awakening - they could not find a higher awakening, so we come before this person in order to begin anew. *We have seen clearly that there is a beautiful path.* "Path" here means the pure teachings - the way, the light. With the great good fortune we are drifting on the ocean and we see the lighthouse, and we know that we have returned. For so many lifetimes we have been in confusion and ignorance, but now we see the light of the Buddha dharma and we have an opportunity. *Therefore, we turn in the direction of the light of loving-kindness,* because love is a light that brings us out of suffering. *We bow deeply to the Buddha and our spiritual ancestors.* The Buddha is one of our spiritual ancestors who has established the path of awakening, and Buddha Shakyamuni said that before him there were other Buddhas. Therefore Shakyamuni also had spiritual ancestors, such as Buddha Kasyapa, Buddha Vipashyn and Buddha Sikhin; therefore, "Buddha and ancestral teachers" mean that Buddha and ancestral teachers throughout all generations are one, so we bow down to them all. Buddha is a spiritual teacher and the spiritual teachers and ancestors are the continuation of Buddha who can light the path and guide our steps. We bow deeply to the light which we use to shine on our path and guide our steps. Buddha and teachers are one. *The wrongdoing and suffering which has imprisoned us has resulted from great hatred, ignorance and pride. Today, we sincerely begin anew to purify and free our hearts of the wrongdoing which we have done in our lives;* the harmfulness, not only harming in the sense of killing, but words which are negative. Anything which is not conducive to love and awakening is what is referred to here as just not cruelty - it's the opposite of purified action, and it also means that our body and our mind has become black and dark, without happiness. All these sufferings

pride. *Today we sincerely begin anew to purify and free our hearts.* So we resolve to become anew before the Buddha. I am determined to put an end to my old livelihood and begin a new way of life, taking the 5 precepts or the 10 precepts or the 250 precepts. I want to start a new way of life and put an end to my old way of life - that is the meaning of beginning anew.

There are seven kinds of pride-called the Seven Prides. The first kind of pride is when we say that we are better than others; we feel that we are better than others. It is also pride to say we are just as good as others and to say that you are worse than others, so we can have pride towards those who are not as good as us, or equal to us, or we say that we are better than them. When people are the same as us, and we say we are better, then we can see that we shouldn't do that. Why can't we say that we are better than people who are not as good as us? According to Buddha, people who are not as good as us have Buddha nature just the same as we do; they have the awakening nature just the same as us. Just because the conditions and causes have not been sufficient enough for them to be able to develop that awakened nature, we are not better than they are. In fact, if they had had the right causes and conditions they might well do better than us. We always think that the other person could never be as good as us, so pride is not only to think we are better than those who are equal to us, but it is also to think that we are better than those who are not as good as us.

The second kind of pride is when someone is equal to us and we say that we are better than them, and when someone is better than us, we say we are equal. You're not any better than me; you're just the same. The third kind of pride is when the other person is better than we are and we say that we are better than them. It is not enough to say that we are equal to someone who is better than we are, but when we say we are better than somebody who is better than us - that is going too far. The fourth pride is self-pride, pride of self. That is the basic pride, the root of all pride. We see that the five aggregates are us - the five aggregates are self, or they belong to the self. They are me or they are mine. In our everyday language we say we are very proud - in Vietnamese we say we are very proud of ourselves - but that doesn't really mean what it means here. We are not awakened, yet we say we have realized. This is one of the very important precepts of a monk or nun, very severe. Even though someone has not made realizations in the practice they say that they have made realizations in the practice, or they do things to make people think they have realizations in the practice, and they offend against the precept. All these are superiority complexes.

Then there is the complex of being worse than others - thinking we're not worth anything, an inferiority complex. In the novice precepts there is a sentence describing this in Chinese - *if the other is a hero then we can be a hero; we should not despise ourselves...* And finally there is wrong pride, which means we do not have virtues, but we make out that we have virtues. We call our self, "The Venerable One". We do not have compassion and love, but we make out we have compassion and love. We don't have insight, but we make out we have insight. These are of the seven different manifestations; forms according to the Abidharma Koshasastra of Vasubandhu. There are also theories of three prides... the ten prides, etc. Our substance is this equal nature, the Samathajnana, the sameness, the equal-ness nature - to be able to see the sameness and the equal-ness of all species with ourselves.

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*The wrong actions that have imprisoned us have resulted in greed, hatred, ignorance and pride. Today, we sincerely begin anew in order to purify and free our hearts.* These words want me to proclaim that I do not want to continue the life of suffering which I have had in the past. I want to develop a new life so that is why I am beginning anew. When I have begun anew, I will have a new energy and I will feel light in my heart and my body, so today we sincerely begin anew. *Awakened wisdom bright like the sun and moon - immeasurable compassion, merciful and kind.* These are two sentences to praise the Buddha - on the one hand there is compassion and on the other hand there is wisdom. The wisdom of the Buddha is like the sun and moon and the love of the Buddha can rescue very many sentient beings. *We resolve to live well throughout our life, going for refuge to the Three Jewels.* We look up at the Buddha and see that the Buddha is the example for us to follow - an example of compassion and wisdom. And we want to follow the Buddha, we want to be as Buddha, we want to go on the path of Buddha; we are resolved to live well throughout our life, going for refuge to the Three Jewels. That is, we take whole life and go for refuge with our whole life, all the way, with everything we have. We bring all our life and we invest it in the Three Jewels. *We shall take the boat of loving kindness to go over the ocean of sufferings.* This is not a matter of belief; this is a matter of action. There is a boat and you get onto the boat - the boat of loving-kindness. It is only that boat that can help me to go over the ocean of suffering and reach the other shore. That is the boat of wisdom, so this is action - it

action - it is not a wish, a desire.

*So we shall use the torch of understanding to come out of the forest of confusion, the forest of wrong perceptions. With determination we shall realize learning, reflecting and practice.* Learning, reflecting and practice are the progress of the practice. You hear the teachings - you look deeply into what you are listening to - you shine light on what you hear and what you hear shines light on your own thought and on the environment you're living in. You see how you have suffered and how you have lived and you are determined to get out of that situation by learning, reflecting, and practicing - that is, applying what we have looked deeply into. We have heard, and we have used what we have heard, to look deeply and then we practice. After that, we apply it in our daily lives. With determination we shall realize learning, reflecting and practice. Every day we do this - we learn and we bring what we have learnt into our daily life.

*Right view shall be the basis of actions of body, speech and mind.* Right view means there are many ways to define the meaning of right view. First of all, it is the insight, which depends on the principle of the Four Noble Truths. This is the principle of the Four Noble Truths - to practice learning, reflecting and practicing. The first of the Four Noble Truths is that we have to recognize our suffering - the suffering, which I am bearing, and the suffering, which those around me are bearing. We have to accept that this suffering is real and be sure not to say, "Oh, I'm not suffering-why should I be suffering?" We have this kind of suffering which we have to admit - I am suffering, I am suspecting, I am unkind, I am angry, I am blaming, I am craving, I am attached. I have these sufferings and I accept them. And after that, I look deeply to see the causes of my suffering. Why am I suffering these particular thoughts? And that is the look of those who practice according to the Second Noble Truth - the making of suffering. Then we can see the reasons that have brought about our suffering, and we are determined to put an end to it because these sufferings can end. So, the third Noble Truth is the way to transform and end our suffering, and this is called the path of reflecting. In learning reflecting and practicing we have to go on this path and when we practice the Four Noble Truths we have to be able to see the Four Noble Truths not as a matter of knowledge, knowledge is not right view. Right view is to learn about these sufferings and to be able to get insight into them, to recognize them in us, to know why we have them, and to see that there is a method, a way, a path to transform them. Learning, reflecting and practicing has to go according to the Four Noble Truths. It has to be applied in terms of the Four Noble Truths, and in the light of the Four Noble Truths we can learn, reflect, and practice.

Shariputra said that right view could be defined in the light of the four kinds of nourishment or edible food. The Buddha taught that there is nothing, which can exist without being nourished. Our happiness needs to be nourished if it is to continue, and our suffering has to be nourished in order for it to continue. There is nothing that can continue to live without nourishment and therefore we have to look with the eyes of the four nourishments. First of all, the nourishment we bring in through our mouth - these foods can bring about suffering or happiness for us. We have to look into them to see clearly the basis of food. Looking into the food, edible food, we see the substance of these things and we know whether we should eat them or not. That is right view, and in learning, reflecting and practicing we have to do this. Second is the food of sense impression, that is the matter which we bring into us through the six organs of the senses - the eyes, ears, nose, body, mouth and tongue - the smells which we are attracted to, the stories, the novels, the songs and the films which we look at. They all belong to the second kind of food called sense impression food.

The first is edible food the second is sense impressions. When we are driving through Bordeaux, we see the advertising boards and sometimes we hear a love song and all these things are food - called the food of sense impression, and if this food is poisonous we should be able to see that. That is right view. We are singing an emotional song, we're listening to an emotional song, then we are eating sense impression food. We eat the sentimental song and then when we're sitting it'll come back to us again, so when we are in the monastery, if we don't look at films, we don't read books of the world, we are protected to a large extent. Because those images will go into us and darken our souls, they agitate and disturb our whole mind. These are the kind of poisons which those in the world consume every day and they have to learn how to transform this. If we are depressed, it may be because we have not looked after our sense impression food. We have seen or heard things, which make us anxious and despairing. All these things can come from the food of sense impression. When we come into the monastery, practice the 10 precepts, the 5 precepts, the 14 precepts, we protect ourselves. We do not consume intoxicating sense impression food and learning, affecting our practice, which is illuminated by right view. If we leave the practice center and go to Bordeaux for 24 hours, we will begin to consume the sense impression food of the world, it is enough time for us to be intoxicated. What if we are in the world for our whole life? Sense impression food is a

stability and what kind of food will bring back destruction.

The third kind of food is called intention. The food of intention is our wishes and our desires for the future. Someone's life is directed by their intentions. We want to become a nun or a monk. The reason why we become a monk or a nun is because in us there is an energy that motivates us pushes us. We want to become a monk or nun; we want a simple life; we want to transform our suffering. We want to train ourselves in the capacity to help the world, and that energy is what pushes us to become a monk or nun - that is the food of intention. But there are also intentions, which don't take us in a good direction like that - they could take us in the direction of sadness. A person may think that they have to kill the person that has made them suffer in order for them to be happy. The other person has done so many injustices to him and if he cannot kill the other, he does not feel satisfied, and so the only reason he stays alive is to get revenge. His life only has one motivation - that is to take revenge on the other person. Or we want a certain position like a manager or director - we say that if I cannot be director, there is no point in my being alive, so all body, speech and mind actions, all strength of mind, is used in order to have that post. We see a great energy in that person, but we know when that person does become director he will have to suffer. So our motivation could be our hatred or our anger. Mindfulness will show us where this food of intention is leading us because we are being driven away on the path of suffering. If that energy is the energy, which pushes us on towards the direction of enlightenment and freedom, of saving others, then that action has a very wholesome intention and we should be very happy to have that kind of intention. But if our intention belongs to the realm of craving, hatred or revenge we should see that, and we should not allow this source of food to destroy us. We need right view to be able to see that. If we don't see that then we don't have right view.

Finally, there is the food of consciousness. Our consciousness every day eats a great deal, and we become what we eat as far as consciousness is concerned. We are what we eat and we eat all kinds of things. We have edible food as well as sense impression food, attention food, and consciousness food. Master Tang Hoi said that our consciousness is like a great Ocean - it receives the water from the rivers from all directions – the Ganga, the Mekong, the Red River, the Mississippi River – we receive all these sources of wholesome things and unwholesome things. If we received too many negative things we will use them to do negative things, so we should see that our consciousness is like a great Ocean, receiving the waters of all rivers. We have to be aware that our consciousness is six sense objects and if we don't have mindfulness and practice guarding these six sense objects then our consciousness will be poisoned. The fifth mindfulness training talks about this, so when we talk about right view, first of all we talk about right feeling being the insight which flows on from the Four Noble Truths, and right view is the insight which follows on from the four kinds of nourishment. I'm determined to practice learning, reflecting and practicing; these are the basis of our practice.

*Right mindfulness will determine our walking, standing and sitting.* When there is mindfulness, there is benefit. When there is no benefits, it is because there is no Mindfulness. This is the training of the monk or nun and also the layperson because our practice is the practice of right mindfulness and when there is right mindfulness of walking, standing, lying down, and sitting, it will be different, more beautiful. So if we live deeply every moment of our life, right Mindfulness will determine the form of our speaking, smiling, coming in and going out. *Whenever anger and anxiety enter our heart we are determined to come back to ourselves with conscious breathing.* This is like a treaty we sign whenever we are angry or anxious. We do not allow these things to pull us away; we are determined to practice; we return to our breathing. If not, we are not a monk or a nun, we are not a lay practitioner who practices mindfulness.

*Every step enters the Pure Land every look sees the Dharmakaya.* If we practice already then each step of ours will nourish us. If not, we are walking in the Saha world, or in the hell realms - and that is a great pity for us because we practice for mother, or father, for grandparents, for spiritual ancestors, and for future generations. We have to be able to walk on the Pure Land. That is the only way to practice. If we have mindfulness, if we can dwell in the present moment, we are in touch with the wonderful things of life and the Pure Land is present right here and now. If we continue to walk in the Saha world, we let down our family and we betray our body and our mind, so why are our steps based in the world of dust? Why can we not step in the Pure Land where every look is able to see the Dharmakaya? You have to look deeply. If you look superficially you will not see the Dharmakaya. Look at a pebble, a flower, a glass of water. Look at a brother or a sister deeply. To see deeply into our nature our education needs to be changed. When we send our children to the middle school, the high school, or the University, they learn a lot but when they are 20 or 25 years old their capacity to be able to see themselves and to see those around them is very weak. In society and life they still do not know themselves and they do not know those around them because the

we know that we are angry and sad. When we walk, we know we walk and when we sit, we know we sit. That capacity in them is so very weak. So educators, who have studied so much, when they are 25 years old they still don't know themselves and the people around them. Therefore, we have to change our education.

Who is an educator? Who are those concerned about the future of education? There are adults who are 22 years old and do not know what is happening within themselves, do not know who they are - these people go around in the world not knowing what is happening to them. It means that their level of mindfulness is very low and when we don't know who we are and what is happening to us, how can we see those around us deeply to see that they are also suffering? They are also caught. How can we look at them with the eyes of loving kindness and compassion? How can we understand them?

To know ourselves, to have self-awareness - we know our body is there, we know our mental formations are there. We learnt these things in the Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness. Here is this body, here is this mental formation; this body is in such a state; this mental formation is in such a state. A young person of 25 years old should be able to see these things, should be able to look deeply. Why have they been ten years in school and not learnt this? What is the point of learning so much mathematics, for what reason? If we don't know what is happening in us, how do we know what is happening with us as far as feelings are concerned? The Buddha taught that when we have a feeling, we should look at that feeling from within and from outside. And if we know our feeling we can also know the feelings of another, when our elder brother has a difficult feeling we know it. If we don't know it then we could say something that could make him even more unhappy. If we don't know ourselves, we won't know another person's feelings. We should observe our feelings from the inside and from the outside. If we can see our feelings within us, then we will see the feelings in others and we will be careful and will stop ourselves from saying and doing things, which will make the other person, suffer even more. Therefore, to go to school and University for ten years in the world can teach us nothing. Our capacity to see ourselves is very elementary and when we cannot see ourselves, how can we see those around us?

When we have mindfulness concerning ourselves, concerning our feelings, we will have a capacity to put ourselves in the place of the other, which is called "empathy" by psychologists. Chinese people translate it as, "*entering into the other*." It means we see the presence of the other and we can enter into the other in order to be able to feel what the other feels. That is what is meant by "looking deeply" - we can put ourselves into the flesh and bones of the other, into the mind of the other; we can see how that person is feeling. If there is suffering and sadness, we go into that person and we can feel their pain, and if we can feel the feelings of the other we can understand the other and we will not do or say anything which could make that person suffer more. But if we can't do that for ourselves, if we cannot see our own mental formations, how can we see the mental formations of a younger brother or sister, or an elder brother or sister? Therefore, self-awareness leads to empathy. So the first thing is self-awareness, and the second thing is an empathic awareness of others and this is what we should be able to do. Only when we can do this, when we can see the other, enter the other - only then can we have real loving-kindness and compassion. That is one of the aims of education, therefore we have to practice correctly and solidly and then bring these things out and hand them on to our society. We should apply these things in the field of education so that the world can have much less suffering. If we cannot understand ourselves, we cannot understand others; if we cannot love ourselves, we cannot love others. Therefore self-awareness leads to an empathic awareness of others and there is a capacity to enter others and feel their feelings, and then we can look at them with the eyes of understanding and love and only then we help them suffer less.

These things are taught by the Buddha in the Four Establishments of Mindfulness - the mindfulness of the body in the body, mindfulness of the body from within and from outside. We are mindful here and we are mindful there, and when the six sense organs touch sense objects we should always use careful attention. And as we look we should see the Dharmakaya. The Dharmakaya is the wonderful reality of all that is. The Dharmakaya is the world of no birth and no death and if we do not have a deep insight, we are not able to be in touch with the Dharmakaya. Every step enters the Pure Land, every look sees the Dharmakaya - this is the "*dwelling happily in the present moment*" practice. We can see the Dharmakaya - the wonderful world of no birth and no death. The Dharmakaya is not some vague idea or wish for the future, but something we can do right now, something we can do by means of our mindful steps, our mindful looking. *Every step has to be in touch with the Pure Land and every look has to be in touch with the no birth, no death nature of the Dharmakaya.* That is what the hearer does and that is something we can do now - it is not a wish for the future.

*habit energies can be transformed, our hearts garden of awakening will bloom with one hundred flowers.* Each one of us has habit energies and not one of us can say they are without habit energies. This comes from our ancestors and when we live together we accept each other's habit energies. We do not say, "*you have to get rid of your habit energies and then you can stay with us*". I want to be accepted with my habit energies and I vow that I will practice with my habit energies, so we transform ourselves and we transform our ancestors and our descendants. If we don't practice, we shall hand on our habit energies. Our hearts garden of awakening blooms with one hundred flowers - our hearts garden - that is the ocean of our consciousness - we guard it and we transform it and therefore the flowers open. *May we bring the feeling of peace and joy to every house, may we plant wholesome seeds on ten thousand paths.* So we bring peace and joy to many houses, and in our daily life, at every moment we are able to sow wholesome seeds. A smile, a look, a word, they all can sow wholesome seeds. *May we never leave the Sangha body.* The Sangha body is the Pure Land. This is the Pure Land teaching - the Pure Land lies in our heart.

*May mountains and rivers be our witness as we bow our heads and request the Lord of Compassion to encompass us all.* So our teacher, the Buddha, has saved and rescued beings in our world and we are the continuation, so if I have to be born again, I will be a disciple of the Buddha and continue the work of rescuing beings. So this world is the enlightenment place of our Teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni, and we will stay in this enlightenment place in order to continue the work of our Teacher. This is a vow we make - may mountains and rivers be our witness as we request the Lord of Compassion to encompass us all. Not to leave us outside of his embrace, the embrace of his practice of transformation. Whenever we read this chant, we water the seeds of our ideal, of our happiness, of our direction. If we have mindfulness while reciting this, we will have a lot of happiness as a result.

--- Bell ---

END

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# Cultivating Mindfulness in the Context of a Sangha

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Dear Sangha, today is the 30<sup>th</sup> of July, 1998, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We are going to speak English today.

The bell of mindfulness is an important practice in Plum Village. Every time you hear the bell, you shouldn't do anything, you shouldn't think of anything, you shouldn't say anything. You have to go back to your in-breath and out-breath, and listen very deeply. Because the sound of the bell is considered to be the voice of the Buddha calling us back to our true home, that sound is very sacred. The sound may be said to be something outside of you, but if you practice for a few days, you will know that that sound does not really come from the outside, it comes from the inside.

The Buddha is someone who is very close to us. The Buddha is the power of awakening, of loving, of understanding in us. Every time the Buddha is calling, we have to listen with all our being. That is why our minds have to be with our bodies; so we stop every activity, including thinking, and we go back to ourselves, using our breathing as a vehicle. We arrive, and we listen very deeply to the voice of the Buddha. That is the voice of peace, of stability, of freedom. If we don't know how to listen to the voice of the Buddha, we won't be able to restore peace, tranquility, and solidity inside ourselves. In Plum Village we enjoy the practice of listening to the bell very much. Every time I listen to the bell, I feel I am a better person. I am more solid, I am more free. I am calmer, more understanding. That is why everyone should profit from the practice of listening to the bell of mindfulness.

You will notice that in Plum Village we practice mindfulness of listening with other sounds. For, example, every time we hear the telephone ringing, all of us in Plum Village will stop our talking, stop our thinking, and go back to our in-breath and out-breath, and listen. Even though the sound of the telephone is a very ordinary kind of sound, when you practice, it becomes something very important too. We practice breathing, with the gatha: "Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home." "Listen, listen," that is what you say when you breathe in. When you say, "Listen, listen," that means "I am listening deeply," and when you breathe out you say, "This wonderful sound brings me back to my true home." My true home is where there is peace, there is stability, there is love, and I love to go home, because at home I feel safe.

We have been practicing telephone meditation for, I think, fourteen years now in Plum Village. All of us enjoy the sound of the telephone. The sound of the telephone does not irritate us anymore, because we can consider it to be a bell of mindfulness. The bell master does not need to be here, the bell master can be somewhere in Canada, or Russia; and suddenly we have a bell master ringing the bell for us to breathe in and breathe out, and we feel wonderful. When the first sound is heard, we stop talking, we stop thinking, we enjoy our in-breath and our out-breath, and we smile. When the telephone rings for the second time, we can still afford to breathe, to smile, to enjoy ourselves. We don't worry, because if the other person has something really important to tell us, she will not hang up after the second ring. Therefore we can still enjoy breathing and smiling with the second sound of the bell. When the third sound is heard, you can stand up, and you can walk in the direction of the telephone, but you do it calmly, breathing and smiling while walking, and you practice walking meditation with a lot of dignity. You don't run like a



rabbit, because you have quieted yourself. You make each step like the steps made by a lion, very firm, very stable, and you are breathing in, calming, and breathing out, smiling. So you are still in a state of concentration. That is the joy of meditation, nourishing you with the element of stability and peace. When you pick up the phone and say, "Hello, this is Plum Village, may I help you?" your voice sounds fine. It sounds peaceful and loving. At the other end of the line, people will be glad to listen to your voice. If your voice is nervous, if your voice is troubled, that would not help very much.

Everyone in Plum Village has to learn how to be in charge of the telephone. You may be in charge of taking care of the telephone one day, and during that day, you practice telephone meditation very, very well. You practice breathing in and out when you hear the telephone ringing, and you practice using loving speech. Your voice should be calm, solid, and loving. You will have an opportunity to practice all of these things, and the next day it will be someone else's turn to practice taking care of the telephone.

If you are the one who is calling, you can also practice telephone meditation. There is a beautiful poem that we use before we make a phone call. In Plum Village, we always do it that way; we never pick a telephone up before we practice mindful breathing and mindful smiling. The poem goes like this: "Words can travel hundreds and thousands of kilometers, and they are supposed to build up more understanding and communication. I am determined that my words will be like jewels. I am determined that what I say will be like flowers." You make the vow to practice loving speech. The poem has four lines; the first line is for your in-breath, the second line is for your out-breath. Therefore, if you practice with the poem you have a chance to practice breathing in and out twice, while you use your right hand, or your left if you want, to touch the telephone. While breathing you calm yourself, and you smile. And after you have practiced breathing in and out like that twice with the gatha, you are fresh, you are calm, you are qualified to make a phone call. That is not only good for you, but good for the other person who will receive the phone call. After having practiced breathing and smiling two times, you begin to dial the number, and after having dialed, you hear the sound of the telephone ringing in the other house. What does it mean? It means that you have another chance to practice breathing in and breathing out.

The other person is still sitting there calmly, listening to the telephone ringing and breathing in and out. She will not come and pick up the telephone just after the first sound, because she is practicing telephone meditation also. So you know that she is still practicing, and you tell yourself, "She is breathing and smiling; why not me?" So you don't wait, you just enjoy your breathing and smiling with the sound of the bell that you hear in the telephone. You know that you have to breathe with at least three sounds of the telephone before the other person will pick up the telephone. If you add it up, you will see that making a telephone call like that, you have at least five sounds with which to practice mindful breathing. Do you know how many mindful breathings you can make with five sounds? With every sound like that you can breathe for one or two or three times, in-breath and out-breath.

Every time we start a Dharma discussion or a Dharma talk, we always invite the bell to sound three times, and after one sound of the bell we breathe in and out three times. This means we breathe in nine times, and we breathe out nine times, and that is enough to bring calm and stability into us. While eating we also practice breathing in and out with three sounds of the bell. So the sound of the bell in Plum Village is quite important, and we also make use of the sound of the telephone. When the other person picks up the telephone, you have already breathed in and out a lot, and smiled a lot, and you are now much better than before you started using the telephone. That is very good for the other person. Talking to each other like that, you see that the quality of your conversation is much better, because you have vowed to say only nice things. You don't reproach, you don't punish the other person, and you don't blame him or her, because you know that blaming or reproaching never helps. So you use only loving speech in order to help the other person to understand you. Communication is a very important practice. Imagine if everyone living in your city practices telephone meditation. There would be much more peace and understanding and joy in your city. People would not be as nervous as they are, people would not be unkind to you, because everyone would know how to practice breathing in and out mindfully, calming and smiling. Everyone would know how to use words that are beautiful like flowers, like jewels, and therefore the quality of life in your city would be very much improved. Therefore, if you enjoy telephone meditation, you should try to help other people to learn and to enjoy telephone meditation also.

The first year we started telephone meditation practice here, we had some problems. We did not have enough experience. When the telephone rang, all of us enjoyed breathing in and out and smiling and calming, and no one wanted to go and answer the telephone. So we had to appoint one person to take care of the telephone, and she had

prefer to be working in the vegetable garden, or cleaning the meditation hall, even if we are in charge of the telephone, and every time we hear the telephone ringing, we have to stop and enjoy the breathing. If you were watering the vegetables, then you would have to stop and turn off the hose, and you would practice mindful breathing in and out. Only after the second sound, and the practice, would you begin to start to walk into the office. It takes time to go from the vegetable garden to the office, so the other person may have had to practice breathing in and out for ten sounds. That happened during the first three or four years in Plum Village—our friends had to wait for a long time. Therefore, they had an opportunity to practice breathing in, calming, and breathing out, smiling.

We not only practice with the telephone, but we also practice with the clock. Every time, every quarter of the hour, when the clock starts playing the music, everyone stops. In every dining hall here in Plum Village there is a clock, and when the clock starts to play music, everyone stops eating, and just listens to the clock very deeply, just as they listen to the bell or the voice of the Buddha. So they enjoy it very much. If it happens that their mind is not there, with the Sangha and with the food, then they have a chance to go back and enjoy the food, and enjoy the Sangha. So the clock is also helping us to go back to ourselves and practice mindful breathing. There are those of us who wear a watch, and from time to time it goes, "beep, beep," and every time we hear that sound we go back to our mindful breathing. It's very helpful.

Fifteen years ago I was in Montreal, and a friend of mine was driving me to the mountains for a mindfulness retreat. During the drive I noticed that on the back of every car there was the statement: *Je me souviens*. That was in the province of Quebec. *Je me souviens* means "I remember." I turned to my friend, and I said, "I have a gift for all of my friends who live in Quebec. While you drive your car, if you happen to see the sentence *Je me souviens*, you have an opportunity to go back to yourself and practice mindful breathing and smiling."

Driving your car you may get lost—not in the city, but in your thinking. You might not be able to live deeply in the present moment. While driving your car you might wish to arrive as quickly as possible, and you continue to think of this or that, getting lost in your thought and your worries. But every time you see the words, *Je me souviens*, it means "I remember to breathe and to smile" and *je me souviens* becomes a bell of mindfulness. So at the retreat I said, "I have a gift to make to all of you. *Je me souviens* is a bell of mindfulness. Every time you drive and you see *je me souviens*, you have to go back to yourself, enjoy the present moment, enjoy breathing in and breathing out. The practice of mindfulness is the practice of being present in the here and the now. You make yourself fully present in the here and the now. You become completely alive in the here and the now. That is the basic practice. In order to be truly present, in order to be really alive, mindful breathing is a very wonderful instrument. Every time you go back to your mindful breathing, you become fully present, you become fully alive, and you can touch life deeply in the present moment. That is why many, many friends of mine in Canada have been practicing *je me souviens* while they drive.

I know that summer vacation is a season when people drive a lot, when there are a lot of accidents and traffic jams. It may not be at all pleasant to drive, but if you know how to practice *je me souviens*, "I am breathing in, breathing out," then the moment becomes pleasant and you will not get nervous because of the traffic jams. When you come to a red light, you might wish that the red light would change as quickly as possible, so that you can continue to drive. You are very eager to arrive, and I don't understand why. It seems that you think that only at the point of arrival will there be peace and happiness, and I am not very sure about that. Sometimes when we arrive, the situation is worse (laughter). The practice of Buddhist meditation is to make the present moment alive and pleasant. You have to make it pleasant and alive and happy right now. That is why I would like to offer to you the red light as a bell of mindfulness. Every time you see the red light, you smile to it. It is a bell of mindfulness; it is a bodhisattva helping you to stop. The red light means "stop!"—stop your running, stop your anguish, stop your belief that happiness can only be possible at the end of the road, that is a superstition and is not true. Whether there is happiness or not depends on the present moment. So when you see the red light, look at it and smile, look at it as a friend, as a bodhisattva, as a bell master. Smile, sit back, and enjoy your breathing. "Breathing in, I enjoy the present moment. Breathing out, I smile." You try to live that moment with peace and freedom. You don't allow yourself to be caught in all kinds of afflictions, irritations and bad humor. We are prey for all these afflictions, and if you go back to yourself and use your mindful breathing and smiling, then you are a better self.

The children are wonderful. They remember what I have taught. I remember once that I gave a retreat for parents and children in southern California, and I talked about the bell of mindfulness, and also about the traffic light. It was reported to me that after the retreat one family drove home very excited about the dharma talk and the retreat, and

the car who remembered the teaching was a little girl, seven years old. She said, "Daddy, breathe in and out—the red light is there." The parents were ashamed, because they had forgotten all the teaching. They got excited about the teaching, but they did not practice. So if you are young, don't think that you cannot help. You can help. Every time you come to a red light, practice mindful breathing and mindful smiling, and if your daddy forgets to do that, you can say, "Daddy, breathe, smile, relax," and then life in the automobile will be much more pleasant.

I know that in our time many of us spend a lot of our lives in automobiles, and meditation practice can be done not only in the meditation hall, but according to the practice in Plum Village, meditation can be done in the kitchen, in the garden, in the office, in the car, everywhere. While in Plum Village we have to learn how to do it, because we cannot put aside a lot of time for sitting meditation. We have to be able to practice meditation wherever we are, and whenever we find it possible. This morning I visited the kitchen of the Upper Hamlet and I observed the gentlemen and the ladies who were chopping vegetables. I did not say "Hello, how are you?" to them, but I was fully aware that they were there, standing and cutting the carrots and the potatoes, preparing the lettuce in mindfulness. The time when you work in the kitchen is also the time for meditation. In Plum Village we have the habit that before a cooking team starts to work, they come and light a stick of incense and practice mindful breathing and offer the incense before they start cooking, because cooking is as holy as sitting meditation. In the morning, if you prepare breakfast, you can transform breakfast preparation into a meditation practice. Follow your breathing in and out, calming, smiling, and become aware of every movement you make. Calm and peace and joy can be obtained in the house, and your children can learn from you.

I used to visit the kitchen, and if I saw a monk or a nun doing something like cutting carrots, I would approach and just stand there, and practice breathing in and out. With my presence there, breathing in and out, I knew that the monk or the nun would be mindful also. So I brought my mindfulness to support the person who was working, and sometimes I would ask, "Dear one, what are you doing?" Most of the time I received an interesting answer, such as "Thay, I am enjoying breathing." That is a very good answer. Sometimes the answer was just silence, and he would look at me and smile. We understood each other very well. And if he said, "Thay, I am cutting carrots," that was the worst answer." Because I was there, and I actually saw him cutting the carrots, so I would have been blind not to see him cutting carrots. So if he answered like that, he had not got anything. So my question, "What are you doing, dear?" meant "Are you doing that with mindfulness my dear? Do you enjoy it?" That was the meaning of my question. That is the language of mindfulness, the language of Zen. So if you answered: "I am cutting carrots," that was a very bad answer. Any kind of answer, but not that one!

In the family, if we want to have more peace, more communication, more happiness, every one has to participate in the practice of mindfulness. First of all, mindfulness of breathing, every time we hear the sound of the bell, every time we hear the sound of the telephone. It would be very helpful if everyone in the family signed a treaty, that every time the telephone rings, everyone in the family would stay still and enjoy breathing in and breathing out, for at least two rings of the telephone...even the very small ones. If you practice telephone meditation like that for one week, you will see the difference. There will be more peace, more harmony, and more unity, in the house. That is why I think the young people can persuade their parents to sign a contract for practicing telephone meditation. You think you can do that? After having practiced telephone meditation for a week or two, will you write me a letter and tell me how you are doing with it? Now a lot of my friends are practicing telephone meditation—even businessmen. You know that businessmen are very busy. Now many of them know how to go from one building to another with walking meditation, walking mindfully, and breathing mindfully. And every time they make a telephone call they always practice mindful breathing in and breathing out. They very often make a series of phone calls, not just one, maybe five or six or seven telephone calls in a row. They have learned how to breathe in and out three times before each phone call. And I am very proud of them. They can bring the mindfulness practice into the busy life of a businessman.

So, the topic for your Dharma discussion today, for the young people, is whether it is possible to start telephone meditation at home. Of course, if you have a bell in your home, and practice the bell of mindfulness every morning, and every evening before you go to sleep, that would be wonderful. When you hear the small bell, please stand up and bow to the Sangha before you go out and start Dharma discussion or whatever you would like to do today.

(Bell)

(Bell)

And you go to your right, walking peacefully.

...The children understand what I tell them.

(Bell)

Someone has asked the question: *if someone has a mental illness, should that person go to a therapist first, or can that person start the practice of meditation?* I have heard a meditation teacher say "you have to go to a therapist first, and then you can come back to me." Still there are people who ask the question: *if you have a problem with mental illness, should you go to a therapist first, or can you already profit from the practice of Buddhist meditation?* I read somewhere that a lay teacher said that you can start by asking the person to sit down on the cushion for some time, one hour or half an hour, to see what happens; then you will know what to do.

I think the answer is that it depends on the type of meditation practice. There are those of us who have so much pain and suffering inside that they cannot afford to be still, to go back to themselves. Every time they sit still, and they begin to pay attention to themselves, they will have to touch the blocks of pain and suffering in themselves. They will be overwhelmed by the energy of suffering in themselves, and that is why they say, "Meditation is not for me. I cannot afford to sit down. It's too calm, and it is the ground for all the suffering in me to manifest." It is true that there are people who have no power to face their own suffering, and who are very much afraid of going home to themselves, because when they go home they will be in touch with the suffering in themselves. There are also those who are afraid of going to sleep, because these pains and sufferings can manifest themselves in dreams. What to do in these circumstances?

The answer within the Buddhist context is that you have to practice taking refuge in the Dharma, and in the Sangha. "Dharma" and "Sangha" here are very concrete things, not just ideas. First of all, taking refuge in the Sangha: the Sangha is a community of brothers and sisters who are practicing. In the Sangha there is the element of stability, the element of joy. The Sangha is a protection, and the Sangha always has a place to be, like a practice center. You go to a practice center and you meet the Sangha. The practice center is a space where everything is created in such a way that you can touch the elements that are refreshing, nourishing and healing. Everything you touch is refreshing, healing and nourishing. The Sangha that is in that place should play the same kind of role, supporting you, protecting you, and nourishing you.

As a member of the Sangha, you know how to walk. You walk mindfully, and with every step you generate the energy of solidity, freedom, peace and calm. You don't run, as on the outside. Every step helps us to go back to the present moment. Every step helps us to touch life more deeply. Every step helps us to touch the wonders of life that are available in the here and the now. Each member of the Sangha should be able to walk like that. In the world, people don't walk like that...not many of them. They are used to running, and they run in order to arrive somewhere, but in a practice center you should arrive at every moment, and every step brings you back to the here and the now, which is your destination. So when you meet the Sangha, you might identify elements of the Sangha who are authentic. Members of the Sangha know how to sit peacefully, wherever they sit: on the grass, on a bench, on the cushions, they always make their bodies and their minds dwell peacefully in the present moment. Sitting means to stop, and not to run anymore. You make yourself available to life, so that life in her turn will make herself available to you. If you are not there, then life will not be there either. Therefore, sitting or walking, you make yourself available, in the here and the now, and life will make herself available to you in the here and the now, also.

The Buddha said that the past is already gone, the future is not yet here; there is only one moment for you to live: that is the present moment. But most of us are not capable of living in the present moment. We are always thinking of the past or the future, because we have anguish, fear, regrets, and anxieties within us. The capacity to be in the here and the now is to be cultivated by the practice. Members of the Sangha should be able to practice that every day, so that when they walk, or they sit, or they do things, they radiate the energy of life, of peace, of stability. The amount of energy, of peace and stability that they emit depends on the level of their practice. Every time you go to a practice center, you profit from that energy. When you see a brother walking like that, you are reminded that you are still running, and you should begin to walk like that too, in order for life to be possible.

Taking refuge in the Sangha is a very important practice. *Sangham saranam gacchami*—I take refuge in the Sangha

—is not a declaration of faith; it is a matter of practice. Abandoned, alone, you get lost you get carried away. That is why you come to a practice center, in order to take refuge in the Sangha. You allow the Sangha to embrace you. You allow the Sangha to transport you like a boat, so that you can cross the ocean of sorrow. If you have a Sangha to belong to, if you have a Sangha to embrace you and guide you in your practice, you are a happy person. So taking refuge in the Sangha is a very deep practice, especially for those of us who feel vulnerable, shaky, agitated, and unstable. *I take refuge in the Sangha* is a very urgent practice. Wherever you are, you have to find a Sangha to belong to. And if your Sangha does not have that quality that you expect, then you should make use of your energy and your time to help build the Sangha, and improve the quality of the Sangha.

The place should be appropriate for the Sangha to be. The Sangha builder is like an architect. She knows how to create a space where peace can be. The trees, the water, the air, nature, should help a lot. Elements of the Sangha should include nature. A beautiful path for walking meditation is very important for the Sangha; it is an element of the Sangha. The air you breathe is very important, the trees surrounding you are very important. The water you see running, and singing, that is an important part of the Sangha. And in that space where nature is available to you, elements of the practicing Sangha are also available to you. This is what we very much need in our time. If you are an architect of the twenty-first century, you have to think of this—an island where we can take refuge, so that we will not be destroyed by the negative elements of life that exist everywhere. The Sangha builder knows how to create a space, and she knows how to convene members of a Sangha, who can live in harmony with each other, who can enjoy the practice, and who can serve as a supporting body for those who come to them. All of us need the Sangha. Creating Sangha is a very important task for all of us. If you enjoy the practice, if you are getting the transformation and healing that you need, then please think of building a Sangha for those you love, and for others who need a Sangha so much. Not only do children need a good environment and a good Sangha, but as adults we all need a Sangha for our protection and for our healing.

The Buddha was a wonderful Sangha builder, and he had many disciples who were excellent Sangha builders also. He knew that without a Sangha, without an environment, the transformation and healing of the people would be very difficult. That is why, if you are a therapist, if you are an educator, please think of it. Healing cannot take place without a place like that, or a body of people like that. You may help to relieve the suffering of someone, but if you put him or her back into his or her environment, then he or she will get sick again, in a few weeks, or in a few months. So after having helped him or her to heal, you should direct him or her to an environment where she can continue her healing and transformation, and she can become an instrument to help others. Our society is sick, many of us are sick, because the environment in which we grow up is not appropriate for our growth, for our peace, for our transformation. That is about Sangha. You need the first element, Sangha.

The second element is the Dharma. You have to take refuge in the Dharma, because the Dharma can protect you, the Dharma not as a Dharma talk, or a book, or a discourse, but the Dharma as the practice, embodied by people like yourselves. When you practice mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful listening to the bell, you bring into yourselves the element of peace, of stability, and you are protected during that time, and you begin to radiate the energy of stability and peace around you. That will protect your children, that will protect your beloved ones, and although you may not give a Dharma talk with your words, you are giving a Dharma talk with your body, with your in-breath, with your out-breath, with your life, and that is the living Dharma. The living Dharma is what we need. We need it very much, as we need the living Sangha. Inside the living Sangha there is the living Dharma.

There is a kind of energy that all of us have to be equipped with, and that is the energy of mindfulness. When we wear that energy, when we are inhabited by that energy of mindfulness, we are ready to go back to ourselves, and we are no longer afraid of the blocks of fear and anguish and suffering in ourselves. But if you don't have that energy as your strength, your protection, when going back to yourself you may be overwhelmed, even crushed by the blocks of pain and sorrow and despair inside you. The question of whether you have to go to a therapist first, before starting Buddhist meditation, could be answered like that. If you were equipped with the Sangha and the Dharma, then you would not need a therapist: you can go home to yourself, embracing the blocks of pain and sorrow and despair in yourself, in order to look deeply into their nature, and begin to transform them, without being a victim of these blocks of suffering. But if you try to go home to yourself without anything to protect you, you might get into trouble. Even if the therapist knows something about you, he or she would not be able to help you, because you are without protection. The therapist cannot be there with you twenty-four hours a day, and during the night or in the early morning, you might be exposed to the pain and the sorrow within you. Therefore, you have to

learn the way to protect yourself from your own suffering. And your own sufferings are also yourself.

The principle of the practice in Buddhist meditation is to cultivate the energy of mindfulness. Mindfulness is the energy of the Buddha, and you can cultivate it. One day of practice can help you to strengthen the energy of mindfulness in you, and a week of practice can help to make that energy much stronger. When you are equipped with that energy, you will have no problem in going back to yourself, and looking deeply into the nature of your pain. The Buddha said, don't be too afraid, don't try to run away from your pain, your suffering. The only way for you to get out is to hold your pain, and look deeply into it.

When you have seen the true nature of your pain, you will see also at the same time the way out of it. That is the essence of the first Dharma talk that the Buddha gave to the five monks. That Dharma talk is about the Four Noble Truths, the first being ill being: there is ill being, there is suffering, there is pain. That is the First Truth. It is called a Holy Truth, because without it you cannot see the second truth, the third truth and the fourth one. If you try to run away from your suffering you cannot understand it, and without understanding its nature, you cannot see the way out of it. That is why suffering is a Holy Truth. But you cannot hold that suffering just like that you are still weak. That is why you need the Sangha, you need the Dharma, in order to generate that energy of mindfulness with which you can go back to yourself and hold the suffering in your arms, like a mother holding her baby in her two loving arms. Our pain and suffering is our baby, our baby that needs our attention, our care, and our tenderness. The Buddha advises us to go home and take care of that ailing baby; you have to have two arms, strong arms, loving arms, in order to pick up the baby and hold it. Those two strong arms, two loving arms, are made of the energy of mindfulness.

Mindfulness is the energy of the Buddha; what makes a Buddha a Buddha is that energy. It is like the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was what inhabited Jesus Christ—he would not have been Jesus if the Holy Spirit had not been in him. But that is not something abstract. You have mindfulness, but you don't have it enough. You are capable of being mindful, but you get lost most of the time. When you pick up the tea, you can pick it up in mindfulness, or without mindfulness. When you drink the tea, you may choose to drink it mindfully, or not mindfully. In our daily lives we usually drink our tea without mindfulness. In our daily lives we breathe in without mindfulness. In our daily lives we sit down without mindfulness. Our practice here is that we try to be mindful of everything that we do, of everything that happens in the present moment. Mindfulness is the capacity of being aware of what is going on in the here and the now. When you drink your tea mindfully, that is the practice of mindfulness of drinking. When you breathe mindfully, that is mindfulness of breathing. When you walk mindfully, that is mindfulness of walking. And when you eat mindfully, that is mindfulness of eating. You have plenty of chances to practice mindfulness.

If you go to a mindfulness retreat for seven days, these seven days are only for the practice of mindfulness. You learn how to do everything mindfully, and surrounding you are brothers and sisters who are trying to do exactly the same. Therefore the practice becomes easy. At home you are alone; you are not surrounded by people who practice mindfulness. But here, when you come, you are aware that everyone is trying to walk mindfully. Every step should bring them back to the here and the now, every step should help a little in the cultivation of stability and peace. So you are reminded by the presence of the sister in front of you, the brother on your left, the brother on your right, and behind you someone is walking mindfully also. You are embraced by the Sangha, and you should let the Sangha embrace you. Suddenly, the practice of mindful walking, mindful sitting, and mindful listening becomes possible. One week of practice like that will help to strengthen the power of mindfulness within you. Every one of us has a seed of mindfulness in us. We are capable of being mindful. The only thing is that we are not mindful all the time. The Buddha is someone who is mindful during the whole day. We can be a Buddha from time to time—we are part-time Buddhas. (Laughter.) With a Sangha we should each be a better Buddha every day.

Mindfulness cannot be mindfulness of nothing. When you breathe mindfully, that is mindfulness of breathing. When you walk mindfully, that is mindfulness of walking. The energy of mindfulness can help us to touch the positive elements of life, and also the negative elements of life. For beginners, it is very important to cultivate mindfulness in order to touch the positive aspects of life. Of course, there are negative things in us and around us, but with the support of a Sangha, we should be able to touch the more positive aspects first. Because in the beginning we are not strong enough to go and touch the negative things in us.

If you are a therapist, and you want to apply this principle to your practice, when your client comes you inquire about the things that have not gone wrong yet. The tendency is to ask what is wrong. Your patient or your client is

gone wrong yet: what is not wrong? You talk about it, you become aware of that, and by touching the positive aspects that are in her and around her, you help her to get the nourishment that she needs. She needs a little bit of joy, stability and peace. You help her to restore the balance. Otherwise the painful aspect is too heavy. I think this is possible. Inviting your client to go for walking meditation is possible...and sharing a tea meditation, where people share their joys, their successes in the practice, their capacity of being peace, of reconciliation, and so on.

You as a therapist also need a healthy Sangha. You will not be the best therapist if you don't have one. And when you introduce your client into that Sangha, your client will feel better right away, in the very beginning. You have to create a space, a Sangha. A therapist without a Sangha to me seems like a musician without an instrument. A teacher also, without a Sangha, cannot do much. The Buddha was very aware of that. He spent a lot of time on Sangha building. He had a lot of difficulties in his efforts to build a Sangha, but he succeeded. His Sangha had enough strength, stability and peace.

The Buddha had a friend who was a king, who was born in the same year as the Buddha—the king of Kosala. His name was Pasenadi. When the Buddha first came to teach in his kingdom, he did not like the Buddha. The Buddha was still very young, and many people called him the enlightened one, and he did not like that. He preferred older teachers. But finally he came to a talk by the Buddha, and he was convinced by the virtue, by the peace, by the compassion of the Buddha, and he became his disciple. At the age of eighty, they met for the last time before the king died. During that time of meeting the Buddha, the king said something like this: "Lord Buddha, every time I look at your Sangha I have more confidence in the Lord." He had direct access to the Buddha—he visited Sravasti, the Jeta Grove where the Buddha lived with his monks, any time that he wished, and he appreciated the Buddha very much. Yet, he made that statement. Every time he looked at elements of the Sangha that moved in dignity, stability and freedom, he had more confidence in the Buddha. So the Sangha helped the Buddha a lot in helping people. That is why I said that a good teacher would need a Sangha. Without a Sangha a teacher cannot do much. You, as a therapist, need the same. In the Sangha you have an instrument to prove that healing is possible, transformation is possible, joy is possible. With that Sangha, you can be much more successful in your attempts to help people. The same thing is true with educators, physicians and artists.

Sangha building is not a matter for Buddhist practitioners alone. Everyone has to learn something about Sangha building, because a Sangha is a very important element for us to help people. Dharma, in this case mindfulness practice...the practice is conducted in such a way that the energy of mindfulness is generated every moment of your daily life. Walking, sitting, breathing, carrot cutting, breakfast making, everything should be done in mindfulness, to help the grain of mindfulness in you to grow, so that every time you need it, you need only to touch the seed of mindfulness in you, and there you are, embraced by the energy of mindfulness. With that energy of mindfulness, you can touch all the beauties and wonders of life in the here and the now, for your own nourishment, and with that mindfulness energy you can embrace the pain, the sorrow, the anguish, and begin to transform them. Without that you cannot do much. So Sangha and Dharma are what you need. Sangha is the practice center with its members, and Dharma is your daily practice of mindfulness, supported by the Sangha.

In the beginning of the practice, with the support of the Sangha, you will be able to restore balance, in order to be able to touch what is beautiful, refreshing and healing around you, and even in yourself. Even if you think that everything inside goes wrong, that is not true--just a few things have gone wrong. There are still many things inside that have not gone wrong yet. The Sangha will help you to go home to yourself and touch these wonderful things. And the same thing is true with what's around you. It's like a garden—your body, and your consciousness and your environment are like a garden. Maybe there are a few trees and bushes that are dying. You might have let that kind of sight overwhelm you, creating a lot of anguish and suffering. You are not aware that there are still many trees that are solid, vigorous and beautiful. When we come into your garden, we can help to point out to you that you still have a lot of beautiful trees, so why do you cry like that? You have to enjoy the things that have not gone wrong yet within your landscape. And that is the role that the Sangha can play. The therapist has to do the same: identify what is not wrong, and help the client to touch and to embrace those things.

Before a surgery, the doctor will look at your body to see if your body has enough strength to endure the surgery, and if you are still weak, then he or she will help to bring a little more strength into your physical body, so that you can tolerate the time in surgery. It is the same here. If the sorrow, the fear, the pain, is a little bit too much, then you should not go directly to it, trying to solve it as soon as possible. You should do the other thing first: you should lean on the power of the Sangha in order to enjoy the steps you make, and what you see, to enjoy the wonderful

little boy is still wonderful, and you are not capable of touching these. To you everything is still dark, negative. You have lost your capacity to smile, and you feel that left alone you cannot make it. But if you have a friend you trust, a friend capable of smiling, of enjoying a cup of tea, and if you go to him or to her, you will feel her energy support you, and walking with her in the garden, you will be capable of seeing that the dandelion is beautiful. Intellectually, you know that the flower is beautiful, but practically, you have no power to touch that beauty, because something is standing between you and that flower. You know that there are beautiful things, but you just cannot touch them. You think that you are going to die, to break down. Since your friend has come, walking beside you, sitting close to you, you feel the capacity of enjoying a cup of tea again. You feel that you can touch the beauty of the flower again. That is the spiritual strength, the positive elements in the other person that can support you.

When you come to a Sangha, you have to know how to profit from the energy of the other people in the Sangha. Many of them are capable of enjoying a beautiful sunset. Many of them are capable of enjoying a cup of tea and dwelling firmly in the present moment, and not allowing worries or regrets to infiltrate and spoil everything. Sitting close to these people, walking close to these people, you profit from their energy and suddenly you have restored your balance. You can do that, so don't use your time to speak about negative things. Make good use of your time, and practice touching the positive aspects of life in you and around you. The time will come when you have to be on your own, and without that energy of mindfulness, you cannot be on your own. Therefore, the time being with the Sangha is very precious. Allow yourself to use the time just to practice, to restore balance.

(Thay begins drawing on white-board.) Suppose there is a house, with a big basement, and a living room. Our consciousness is like that: we have a big storehouse, and a living room. In Buddhist psychology, we call the living room "mind consciousness." We call this lower part "store consciousness," because the basement is used to store many things. All our suffering, our fear, our despair, we want to throw all of them down there, lock the door, and not allow them to come up. We are afraid of going home to sit in the living room, especially when the living room is empty, because then the blocks of pain, of fear will always try to push the door open and go upstairs. These blocks of pain are there, within the depth of your consciousness. In the past we have lived in forgetfulness, we did not care about what was happening, and we have allowed these blocks of pain and suffering to be formed. We didn't know how to prevent them from being formed—we call them "internal formations." The Sanskrit term is *samyojana*, blocks of pain, of sorrow, of fear, of anger, of attachment.

We are afraid of going home to ourselves because we know that if we do, we will have to face these blocks of pain when they manifest themselves. That is why our practice is to keep the living room always occupied. Most of us follow that policy: every time we feel that it is empty, we invite someone to sit there in order to occupy the room. That is the easiest way to prevent these things coming up. We complain that we don't have the time for ourselves, but when we have one hour, three hours, we don't know what to do with this time. We feel threatened, because if we sit alone in the living room, these monsters will try to come up, and therefore most of us will do something like picking up a magazine to read, or turning on our television sets to watch, or picking up the telephone to talk with someone. We cannot afford to sit in the living room without doing anything. We are afraid. We have to consume. Some of us take refuge in eating: we go to the kitchen and open the refrigerator, and we eat in order not to think of these things. This is the practice of repression. We don't see it as repression, but we are actually practicing repression. We want to keep all these things down there, so we always invite someone or something to be sitting in the living room, and we close the door very carefully, so that these things will be unable to come up. And it works. We keep the living room busy, and the market will provide us with many means to keep this living room busy: television, radio, magazines, conversation, music, shows, and so on.

What happens, silently, is that we create a situation of bad circulation in our psyches. Our psyches are like our blood: they have to circulate well in order for us to be sane and healthy. If the blood does not circulate well, we'll have many kinds of trouble. Massage helps the blood to circulate better, or sometimes we take medicine to help the blood to circulate better. We know that good circulation of our blood is very important for the well being of our bodies, and if we exercise, we run, that is to help with our blood circulation. If we have a headache, it may mean that the blood is not circulating well, so massage can help. Because we have tried to suppress them, these things do not have a chance to come up any more, and that has created a situation of bad circulation in our psyche, and symptoms of mental illness can appear. They are there, and you believe that they are not active, but they are very active, day and night. They are acting from the depth of our being, and they shape our behavior, the way you behave here, as expressed by eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. The six senses are acting under the direction of the blocks of pain inside. You react in a particular way because the blocks of fear push you to react like that. If suddenly



panic, that is because of a block of fear in you, pushing you. So even if you try to block their way, they are still very important in your daily life, in shaping your behavior. This situation of bad circulation will result in the manifestation of symptoms of mental illness.

If you get depressed, don't think that the depression comes just like that. You have lived in such a way, you have dealt with your emotions, your sensations, your perceptions, in such a way that depression has become possible. Looking into the nature of your depression, you can find out how it has come to you. So, the answer is that blocking the way is not a healthy thing to do. You should be able to let it come up, but you are afraid. What you need is the Sangha and the Dharma. The Sangha can play the role of supporting you. The Dharma can play the role of helping you to develop the positive aspects in yourself. Mindfulness helps you to water the positive seeds in yourself. You are capable of contemplating the blue sky, you are capable of spending some time drinking tea with a friend, you are capable of walking meditation, in order to touch the wonders of life, and while doing so you strengthen the seed of mindfulness that is here in you. All of us have a seed of mindfulness. Maybe it is a little bit weak, but if you practice mindfulness of breathing, of walking, of eating, then that seed of mindfulness will become stronger and stronger.

When a block of pain manifests itself in the living room, your practice is to touch the seed of mindfulness, invite it to come up in order to take care of the block of pain that is there. Suppose this is your fear, or your anger. At that moment when your anger manifests itself, you have a zone of energy. Let's call it energy Number One. If you allow that energy to be alone in your living room, that would not be healthy. You've got to do something; you've got to practice. Your practice is to go back to your mindful breathing and touch the seed of mindfulness in you, and then you have the second zone of energy, called energy of mindfulness. This zone of energy is playing the role of a big brother or a big sister, embracing the pain. When the baby cries, the mother will come to the baby's room and pick the baby up, and hold the baby tenderly in her arms. You need to do exactly the same thing: "My little pain, I know you are there. I am here for you, taking care of you." That is the role of mindfulness. You hold your pain tenderly in your arms, and if you want the energy of mindfulness to continue to be there, you can practice continuous mindful breathing or mindful walking, because the mother has to be there for some time before the pain of the baby can be relieved.

Mindfulness is the energy that helps you to be there, to be there for your happiness and to be there for your suffering. Suppose you were standing with a group of friends, looking in the direction of the sunset. Mindfulness helps you to be truly there, body and mind united. That is why you can touch the beautiful sunset deeply, you are truly alive, you are fully present, and the beautiful sunset is there for you. A few minutes of contemplating the beautiful sunset can be healing, can be nourishing. But if you stood there with other people, and your mind was preoccupied by something else, if you were absorbed into your fear about the future or your regret about the past, even standing there with a group of people, you are not really there. You are not mindful. You are not in the here and the now. That is why mindfulness helps you to bring your body and mind back together to produce your true presence, and that presence is essential for you to touch what is happening in the present moment. In this case it is not a beautiful sunset, but the block of pain that manifests within yourself. So mindfulness is there to take care of the pain. "My dear depression, I know you are there. I am here for you, taking care of you." You need to maintain your mindfulness alive, because the block of suffering is there, and needs to be attended to. We know that we are not only the mindfulness, but we are also the pain. The pain in us is not our enemy, it is us, it is our baby. We cannot run away from it, we have to embrace it, hold it tenderly in our arms, look deeply into it, take good care of it, and in that way we can transform it.

The practice is that every time your fear or your anger or your despair comes up, you should be able to invite your mindfulness to come up, and with mindful breathing, mindful walking, you embrace your pain as long as you need. After some time, a few minutes later, your pain will go down again in the form of a seed. "Seed" is a technical term in Buddhist psychology. *Bija* is the Sanskrit term. Every mental formation is there in the form of a seed. If someone comes and waters that seed it will sprout, and become a zone of energy up here. There are about fifty-one categories of mental formations here, and our fear, our anger, are just two of them. So there are positive mental formations and there are negative mental formations here. Positive mental formations have to be nourished, and negative mental formations have to be taken care of and transformed. You don't have to fight, because if you fight, you fight yourself--violence.

Buddhist meditation is based on the insight of non-duality. You are it. So the appropriate way is to deal with it non-

to do the job. Your fear or your anger will go down after a moment, and become a little bit less important. Every time your pain is bathed in mindfulness, it will lose a little bit of its strength. If you practice you will see that. And the next time it comes up again, you do the same thing. "Hello, my pain, hello there, my despair; I know you are there. I am here, ready to be available for you." And you embrace it tenderly, in walking meditation, in sitting meditation, in mindful breathing. But you need to have this energy in order to do the job, and this energy is to be cultivated by the practice of mindfulness in the context, in the setting of a Sangha. That is why the Sangha is important.

If you have succeeded once in embracing and taking care, you are no longer afraid, you have confidence. Next time when your pain manifests you will do the same. In just a few weeks you can restore good circulation, and the symptoms of mental illness will begin to disappear. But that does not mean that you have to do it all by yourself; the Sangha can help you, the therapist can help you, the teacher can help you, the brothers and sisters in the Dharma can help you. If you think that your mindfulness is not strong enough for you to embrace your pain alone, you can ask a sister in the Dharma to sit close to you, a Dharma brother to sit close to you. He has his strength of mindfulness. "Dear sister, don't be afraid, I am here for you. I will take your hand. I will bring my mindfulness and join your mindfulness, and our mindfulness together will be enough for you to embrace your pain." Sometimes something is too heavy for one person to carry, and you divide the burden, with your friend coming to help you. And both of you can carry the heavy thing. The same thing is true here. If your block of pain is too heavy for you to carry, to embrace, then a Dharma sister or a Dharma brother can sit next to you and bring his or her support to you in embracing your pain. That has always been true. That is why, in the path of practice, to have a Dharma brother, to have a Dharma sister, is a wonderful thing.

Again, we need a Sangha. Without a Sangha I don't know how we can do it, how we can make it. Even if you learn a lot during a retreat, even if you know all the techniques of the practice, when you go back to your city, without a Sangha you can only continue for a few months, and after that your practice will decline until you abandon it completely. Without a Sangha you cannot go far. That is why taking refuge in the Sangha is a very crucial practice. In my country we used to say that when a tiger leaves his mountain to go to the lowland, the tiger will be caught by humans and killed. When a practitioner leaves his Sangha, he will lose his practice. That is why taking refuge in the Sangha is so important. Sangha building is very important. That is why we should find ways to set up a Sangha where we live, and try with our energy and time and resources to help improve the quality of the Sangha. That is for our protection and support, and for the protection and support of many people in the area. You can be a Sangha builder, and if you can build a Sangha, you can help so many people.

Again, I say that taking refuge in the Sangha is not a declaration of faith, it is a practice. If you are a monk, or you are a nun, you have to build a Sangha. But if you are not a monk or a nun, you also have to build a Sangha. If you are a doctor, if you are a healer, if you are a therapist, if you are a parent and you want to protect your child, you have to build a Sangha, because the environment is so bad that you can be sure that your child will get wounded and sick in that environment. So as a parent you have to think of the future of your child. Build a Sangha. And you have to meet with other parents to practice looking deeply in order to start building a Sangha, an environment where your child is safe—it is very urgent. Meditation is not only for monks and nuns and those lay people who stay in practice centers. Meditation should be a thing that we have to do every day, right where we are, in our towns, in our cities, in our families. Please, in your Dharma discussions, discuss this: Sangha building for our protection and for the protection of our children and for the protection of our society.

(Three bells)

End of Dharma talk.

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the interbeing nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# The Discourse on Love

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Dear Sangha, today is Thursday, the 18 December 1997, we are in the New Hamlet in the winter retreat. Today we are studying the Discourse on Love. In the teachings of the Buddha there are the four immeasurable minds. The first one is loving kindness, maitri in Sanskrit, mettā in Pali. The practice of love is very important.

"Those who want to attain peace should practice being upright, humble and capable of using loving speech. "If we are disturbed, we cannot have peace and we cannot have joy. Our mind is thirsty we feel we lack something. We are agitated by anger, hatred thoughts of revenge. We have no peace, no joy, we never feel happy. Even those who have a lot of material possessions and money in their bank account have no peace and joy and they are very unhappy.

Peace and joy are the two basic elements for our happiness. Peace means not to be disturbed not agitated in our mind. Those who want to attain peace have to learn the art of being straightforward. This means not to make insinuations, not go about things in a devious way. But we must use loving speech. We are straightforward, but we use loving speech. When we need something we say it frankly, but we say it with loving speech. There is a Vietnamese poet who says that if you love somebody, you have to say you love them, if you hate somebody you have to say it directly and frankly, even if someone puts a knife to your neck. So, our behavior must be straightforward, honest, clear, simple and humble. Humble means not to be sure that you are number one. Everybody must learn every day. The Buddha, even though he is The Enlightened One, learned more every day. So we have to learn to be humble.

In order to be happy, we have to learn to live simply. When you live simply, you have much more time and you can be in touch with the many wonders of life. Living simply is the criterion for the new culture, the new civilization. With the development of technology people nowadays have become more and more sophisticated and they don't live simply at all. Their joy is to go shopping. Even when we visit a new city, we cannot do anything else but go shopping. Shopping is a disease of our new civilization. The criterion for being happy is to live simply, and have a life of harmony and peace in yourself and with people around you, without aggressiveness, irritation and anger. Those who easily get angry have to learn the art of mindful breathing. When you are easily irritated you have to go back to your breath right away and take good care of your conscious breathing, calming and releasing, so that your face will not be red from anger and irritation. We must learn to know what is our limit, how much is enough. It is the opposite of wanting more and more and more. You know what is sufficient, what is enough for you.

You keep your calm; you will not be carried away by your emotions and the opinions of the majority. An advertisement says: "You must buy that", and then everybody goes out to buy it. When someone says: "that man needs to be beaten", then people can be carried away by the emotions of the majority.

In French literature there is a story about a man who wanted to revenge a cheap merchant. The man, on a trip across the sea, bought a sheep from the merchant and threw that sheep into the sea. All the other sheep of the merchant followed the first sheep into the sea, and the merchant lost everything. We are all like those sheep. We are easily carried away, like the crews who see one ship going into the ocean so they all go into the ocean. Everybody gets angry, so you get angry. Everybody gets excited, so you get excited. We are usually carried away by the big group.

We have to be master of the situation in order not to be carried away by the majority.

The Buddha said that we should not do anything that will be disapproved of by the wise ones. He didn't say let us not do anything that will be disapproved by the high monks or by the arahats. He said the wise ones, because he knew that outside of his Sangha there were many wise persons, in other spiritual traditions.

"May everyone be happy and safe and may their heart be filled with joy." Our first wish is that everyone will be happy and safe. Safe means that you have no accident, there is no natural disaster, no catastrophe, no fire, no robbery, no war and no accident, and you are not attacked by people who want to rob or kill you. Everybody wants to be safe, so we wish that everybody will be safe, not only ourselves. When we go on the airplane we put on the safety belt and we wish that everyone will be safe.

In the Vietnamese text there is a very beautiful word, a compound word meaning very stable. The first word means kind and the second word means very thick. If you say somebody is not very thick, it means sometimes he is good and sometimes he's not. But if you say somebody is thick, it means the person is good and has a lot of stability. People in Vietnam used to say that the Earth is very thick, and when praising someone who is very stable and solid they would say he is very thick like the earth. We have a high monk in Vietnam with this word in his name. When somebody has a lot of virtue and stability then they say this person has a lot of thickness. If they say someone is thin, it means that person will easily betray you. But if somebody is thick it is very good. We also say: "I take care of you thickly". Thickly in this sense means very deeply, profoundly. Ksitigarbha is a bodhisattva representing the earth. And before the sutra on Ksitigarbha, there is a gatha, which speaks of the earth-like qualities of Ksitigarbha, and the words thickness and stability are repeated several times.

"May all living beings live in security and peace". To be free means you are not attached by anything. There are those who work but who are too attached to the work, are not free from the work. In English they're called workaholics. So, we work very well but we are not workaholics, we are not attached, caught by the work. May all living beings live in security and peace. This is not action yet; it's just wishful thinking. But when the wishful thinking is great, it will bring us to the real action. If you do not wish to become a monk or nun then you will never become a monk or nun. You have to wish more than 100 percent that you will become a monk or a nun. So the wishful thinking is a very important energy to lead you to an action. We wish that all can live peacefully on earth; we wish that there is peace in our hearts. We wish it to be safe for ourselves, but we also wish that those around us will be safe, and also those who are far away. Not only that human beings but that animals, plants, the earth, the air, the mountains, the rivers, the ocean will be safe, that your environment will be safe, as will the environment of other humans, living beings, vegetation and minerals.

"Those who are frail, those who are strong." When we are frail we are easily overcome. But when we are strong we also can be overcome. When you live in the forest, even though you are stronger than the rabbit there are always other animals who are stronger than you. And the strong animal could be overcome by a stronger animal. And strong animals also can be killed by small animals. In the sutra, the Buddha used to say that lions can be killed by parasites, the little living beings in his own body. That is to say that nobody can destroy us except ourselves. When we are mindful we can see that there are many little habit energies in us that can kill us more readily than people outside ourselves. So the small things like doubt, fear, jealousy, anger are more likely to kill you than is the lion outside.

"Those who are tall, short, big, small, visible, not visible." Two thousand six hundred years ago the Buddha already saw that there are invisible living beings. Now we know about bacteria, viruses, but at that time he saw already.

"Visible or not visible, near or far away, already-born or yet-to-be-born, may all of them dwell in perfect tranquility."

"Let no one do harm to anyone, let no one put the life of anyone in danger." We don't want any species to kill other species, we don't want any species to despise the life of another species and destroy the life of another species. When we read that sentence and we look deeply, we may discover a lot. You have to read the sutra with your serene mind and then you can discover many things that in the past you thought you understood but now you see that you did not. You see that the lion kills the deer, to eat. We cannot tell the lion not to kill. The lion is a carnivore and the lion must eat meat. But the lion only catches a deer when he is hungry. And when he is finished he leaves the remains for other carnivores to eat, like the wild dogs. But human beings don't need to kill, they are not hungry. But

many people still go hunting. Every time I hear the noise of the hunting, I feel a lot of pain in my heart. How can people be so cruel to each other and to other living beings? They are not hungry. Our life is so precious. But the life of other species is also precious. The lives of other species are precious not only for them but for humans too. When we kill the other species, then we put ourselves in danger too.

During the war in Vietnam we can see that the generals of the US Army are not taught to respect life. They just kill everyone. They are not taught to save as many lives as possible. When you sit on the plane and you drop a bomb you kill a number of soldiers, but you also kill a lot of civilians. The United States is a very rich country and they have a lot of bombs. But they don't know anything about what happens underneath. They never see deeply what happens down there when the bomb explodes. There are children who were just born; there are children only three years old. Not only are they killed but they are handicapped because of these bombs, and they suffer all their life. When I say this I do not say that only Americans are bad, but the other side also did not respect life. During the war a lot of civilians died. And people always pay attention to the success of the battle, they never think of how many people die, how many innocent civilians die. And they don't care much about the minds of people, their unhappiness. The US Government did everything possible to protect the lives of American soldiers, but the American Government never paid attention to the lives of the Vietnamese soldiers on either side. Those who have gone through the war in Vietnam see very clearly that only the American soldiers' lives were protected, but Vietnamese soldiers' lives on both sides were not protected at all, and they didn't care at all for the lives of civilian people. So the life of the nationalists, the Vietnamese soldiers on the pro-American-side, they were also not protected at all. And the lives of the civilians are nothing.

"May no one do harm to anyone, let no one put the life of anyone in danger." When we are angry, we have the tendency to punish in order to feel less angry. We always have that tendency, that when we are angry, when we suffer, we want the other person to suffer too, we want to punish the other person. We think that the more the other person suffers, the more we will be happy, or at least we will feel less unhappy. So the Buddha taught that when you are angry, you look deeply to see that you are suffering. When you are angry you are suffering. And when you are suffering learn not to let other persons suffer; learn to transform our tendency to punish into the tendency to forgive. We suffer already don't let other people suffer.

"Let no-one do harm to anyone. Let no one put the life of anyone in danger. Let no one out of anger or ill-will wish anyone any harm." Here is the teaching of the Buddha about one of the fifty-one states of our mind. This is ahimsa, "no harming". Of course, we can struggle. Buddhism does not ask you not to struggle. But you struggle with the energy of love, not with the energy of anger. You have to have the wish to reach the aim that you struggle for, like for example the liberation of the country. But you can use the energy of love, of understanding. Don't use the energy of anger. Because if you use anger there is confusion. And with confusion and ignorance you can do much damage, and then we have to retreat, and it causes a lot of suffering.

Now the Buddha teaches us how to take action. "Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, we should cultivate boundless love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos." The mother always gives a lot of care to her baby. She carries it nine months in her womb, she gives birth to her child, and she takes good care of her child. So "just like a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, we should cultivate boundless love". So we learn to cultivate boundless love for the person who sits next to us on our left, on our right. How can we learn to love the person on our left like our only child? How can we learn to love the person on our right like our only child, and at the risk of our own life? And we have that love also for our father, our mother, our sister, our brother, and our neighbor.

When the baby is just conceived in the womb of the mother, the baby is small like a little bean. At that time, the baby and the mother are one. The baby grows and grows and the baby is still one with the mother. When the baby is really big in the womb of the mother they are still linked by the umbilical cord, and everything the mother eats, drinks, thinks, will enter into the womb and into the mind of the baby. When the mother suffers the baby suffers, when the mother is joyful the baby is joyful, if the mother is mindful the baby is mindful. If you have no chance to have a baby then your baby is the baby Buddha in you. Don't think that only women can have a baby, men also have a baby. The baby Buddha in us needs to be protected. When the baby is big enough to be born people use a scissors to cut the umbilical cord. We don't see the umbilical cord anymore but we can still see that the mother and the child are very linked. The view that you and the baby are one is correct. But if you hold your baby and force it to be exactly like you, this is not correct either. It's good that you are one with your baby. But the baby receives other

learn to train herself to see that your baby, your child is at the same time you but different from you. She or he has his or her own life. You cannot imprison your child and make them go in your direction and force him or her to do what you like because you want to shape her or him in your mould. That is not correct. Because they are not only the continuation of you, but they are the continuation of many generations of ancestors before you, and perhaps during your time you had no chance to water the good seeds you inherited, and so you don't have the same chance as your child. And when he or she has a lot of new insights, you have to learn from her or from him.

We have to learn to see that we are one with our brother, our sister, our child, our son, and our daughter. Of course, when we see like that then we love everyone. Then we learn to know that those who are not linked to us by an umbilical cord are also deeply linked to us; we see this when we look deeply. And we also need to train ourselves to see that others are us. In the past we praised the king and said he was a very great king because he loves all his citizens as his own sons or daughters. This is a Vietnamese proverb, that "a good king is a king who loves every citizen like his own baby." Literally it says "like the child who is still red", that is who is just born. You take good care of your citizens as if they were your own children. So if you are the king your duty is to bring happiness to all the people in your nation. That truth is not only in Buddhism, but is a deep insight that belongs to many other religions too.

"Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, we should cultivate boundless love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos." This sentence only has meaning if we know how to put it in our daily activities. Everybody would like to love people in that way. But how can you love everyone like you love your own child? According to me, love is the most precious thing in life. There is one thing that has some meaning and that is love. In the Samyukta Nikāya in the Pali Canon the Buddha said the practice of love is the most beautiful thing. In the Agamas, the Chinese Canon, it says practicing love is the purest thing. I think that is an incorrect translation. Because for me practicing maitri is practicing beauty. In order to love properly you have to understand the other person. You cannot claim to love somebody if you don't understand him or her. If somebody has no love at all that person will be a very lonely person. We look around us; we see those who suffer a lot, that is those who have no love at all. She doesn't love herself she doesn't love others. He doesn't love himself he cannot love anyone. Such a person is the most unhappy person on earth. But if you see in yourself a lot of love, you want to love that tree, that flower, the earth, that girl, that boy, that man, that women, then you feel that you are the happiest person on earth.

When you make another person smile, you do something to make another person feel relief, then suddenly you feel very happy. If you do not have a chance to do something to relieve someone else but you have the will to be able to relieve him or her, already that good will is making you happier. Someone who does not have the energy of love, who do not have any will to love, that person is very lost, very lonely and very unhappy. For them this loneliness is like hell, and they feel lost, miserable. So we have to learn to know that loving is a means to help us to make a link between ourselves and other people and other species around us. And we see that we and they are linked deeply by one thing, and that is life. And when we feel that we are one, linked by that deep ocean of life, then we won't have any desire to punish the other person. If you feel hurt by another person try to look deeply at what is behind her mistake, her shortcoming, his un-skillfulness. When we try to understand in that way then we feel free from hurt.

Love is the most beautiful thing in this life. And love helps us to have an open mind and to understand better. Love is the most beautiful gift. Our mindfulness is like a mirror. The mirror reflects our body and our mind. In the early morning when you wake up, you look at the mirror and you see your body, and you smile so that your face looks more relaxed. The most beautiful thing of life is love, and an open mind, large view. Try to be open, to listen and to understand more deeply. Those are the most beautiful things of life: understanding, an open mind, to listen and to understand more deeply. We look at things with an open mind, with attention and with a compassionate view. So I advise you in the early morning when you wake up to look in the mirror and smile. Smile to your face, smile to life. And also learn to love yourself and love people around you with an open mind, with deep listening and deep understanding. So you look at somebody with forgiveness, with inclusiveness, but not in observation and discrimination. Look like a mother looks on her fragile little baby.

If you want to practice diligently you must keep a little booklet in your pocket and write notes. Every day that has been offered to you is a very precious day. In Plum Village I know that a number of you have had to abandon everything in order to come here, either for one year, six months, three months or one, five or seven days. That means a lot of preparation. So one day is a lot if you practice properly. So when you have one day of mindfulness you have to organize properly. When we organize a day of mindfulness we have to prepare beautifully: who will

take care of walking meditation, who will take care of guided meditation, who will take care of the silent meal, of Touching the Earth etc. You organize a day of mindfulness like that, so why don't you organize yourself, organize your days. When you come here for one day, you must organize it in such a way that every minute of the day will be very precious. Don't let the days drift away in forgetfulness. In the early morning, when you do sitting meditation, why don't you use that time to look deeply in order to see that: "I decided to make this day wonderful, I decided to make this very day a great gift for my life and for the life of others around me." Why, when we do sitting meditation do we just sit and wait for the bell to ring in order to announce the ending of sitting meditation. That is a waste. So, sitting meditation time is to look deeply, to prepare how we can make our day wonderful. In the sitting meditation time during the first period you practice calming, and during the second period you should look deeply to make your day beautiful, the happiest day of your life, and the happiest day for the person next to you and those around you.

"We must bring our boundless love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos. We should let our boundless love permeate the whole universe." Your love can be developed infinitely in different directions. There are some things that can only expand to a certain limit, but your love can expand indefinitely, boundlessly. You should let your boundless love pervade the whole universe, above, below and across." When the other person betrays you, when the other person destroys you, when the other person is cruel to you that will not shake you that will not reduce your love. That is true love. If you can love the person who hates you, if you can love the person who destroys your life, that is the love of a great being. But if you only love those who are very loveable, that is not difficult. That is enjoyable, it is not a real practice of love. If you can love the person who is despicable, that is real love, that is a training.

If a certain person behaves in such a way it is because they have had less chance than you. They may have listened to a talk of Thay, but they have not had other favourable conditions you had in your background. That is the reason why you can love them even if they are not a loveable person.

"Our love will know no obstacle." In order to be able to expand our love like that, we need to practice deep looking. Because without practising deep looking, you cannot love easily. The Buddha said that only love can answer hatred. Because if you answer hatred with hatred, the hatred will increase and will destroy not only yourself and the other person but also the whole universe. So only love can answer hatred. "Our love will know no obstacle. Our heart will be absolutely free from hatred and enmity."

"Whether standing or walking, sitting or lying, as long as we are awake, we should maintain this mindfulness of love in our own heart. This is the noblest way of living." We have to cultivate mindfulness of love the whole daylong. When you walk, it is for love. When you sit, it is for love. When you are lying down, it is for love. When you work, it is for love. When you do everything it is for expressing love, it is motivated by love. When you walk, you sit, you are lying down, you work, all are for expressing your love. When you ask the baby to eat and it doesn't want to, you say: "Please, eat one spoonful for mummy, one spoonful for daddy, one spoonful for your sister." You love yourself, your Sangha body, your spiritual path, your teacher, and that is why every act you do is for expressing love.

The mindfulness of love is the presence of love everywhere, every moment of your days. When you are mindful of your love, you can enter slowly into love concentration. Love concentration is everywhere, and your address, your zip code is love: maitri, karuna, Mudita, and upeksa. Maitri means giving joy, karuna is removing suffering, Mudita is feeling joy and upeksa is loving without discrimination, like the right hand loves the left hand. If you cultivate that concentration all day long: when you walk, when you sit, when you eat, when you work, then you are living in the deep concentration of love. It's called maitri concentration, and you can dwell in maitri concentration all day long. "This is the noblest way of living." And thanks to this you will be "free from wrong views, greed, and sensual desire. And you live in beauty and you realize perfect understanding. That perfect understanding is that you are a Buddha. When you cultivate deep concentration of love you are free from wrong views and you will listen to even the most difficult people very carefully, and try to understand them deeply, their difficulties, their environment, their childhood, and when you do like that, you will arrive at the great understanding that is the perfect understanding of an enlightened one. "Those who practice boundless love will certainly transcend birth and death."

The next chant is: We Are Truly Present. "We are truly present, our heart established in mindfulness." When you spend half an hour chanting you dwell peacefully, mindfully in every word. These words are only words of the wise



meditation in the meditation hall. Kinh means weaving, stringing together and every step is like one thread. In the past when we bound the sutra, we used a needle and thread to go through each sheet to keep them together. So kinh means the thread, which weaves all our steps into oneness. Kinh hanh means using the threads of our conscious breath to go through every one of your steps and bring our steps into oneness. Kinh means taking a thread and putting every sheet together, or all the beads together. When you have a necklace of pearls you need a thread to go through every pearl in order to make a necklace. The thread is kinh. Kinh hanh means you use your mindful breath to go through each of your steps. It's difficult to translate. Kinh hanh means you walk mindfully and slowly in the meditation hall. When you walk one hundred steps, you have one hundred mindful steps. If you walk mindfully then your thread will go through every sheet, but if you walk with your mind on different things in different directions, your thread will be broken and the sheets will go in different directions. So if one of your steps is stepping into the world of suffering, anger, jealousy, that pearl will not go onto your thread to make the beautiful necklace.

"We are truly present, our hearts established in mindfulness for sitting meditation, kinh hanh, and reciting the sutra. May the three jewels and the holy nagas support this meditation center." When you say Namo But Thich Ca Mau Ni or Namo Bo Tat Quan The Am it means you evoke the name of Avalokitesvara or Gautama Buddha, and you see that you walk with the feet of Gautama Buddha or Avalokitesvara.

This is the practice of recollection of the Buddha, evoking the name of the Buddha, or evoking the name of the Dharma or the Sangha. During the time we practice silent kinh hanh, or we practice kinh hanh while evoking the name of the Buddha, we weave our steps with the evocation of the image of the Buddha in us, or the image of being peaceful at every step. We know what the sutra says, but we still recite it again because it is not a matter of obtaining more knowledge but a matter of practicing, training ourselves to live the words of these phrases. We already know these gathas we know every word. But when you recite again, you look deep and you may discover many things that the first recitation does not enable you to see. You have to recite with your deep look. But if your mind goes in ten thousand directions, even if your words are recited beautifully it won't help.

Maybe you have recited that sutra for the last ten years but you haven't understood the meaning. But suddenly one night when you recite the words a great world opens in front of you and you discover many beauties. Every time you recite a sutra like that, it's like a sword that can cut through your ignorance. A sword can cut your ignorance every day. Maybe today you think that this is one recitation like many other recitations. But you never know, your concentration may be deep and suddenly some word of the chanting goes deep into you and you get a deep insight. So you can be enlightened during recitation of the sutra, too.

"May the three jewels", the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha in you. Buddha is also the historical Buddha. Dharma is the methods that help you to transform your habit energy, and Sangha is those around you. The Vietnamese version also mentions the Holy Spirit that helps you, because we believe that when you practice many holy spirits come together with your spirit to make things much better. Good energy attracts good energy. "May the three jewels and the Holy Spirit support this meditation center with its four Sanghas, protect them and support them". I think that the English text has to be translated by Holy Spirit more than Naga. Naga doesn't have any meaning for people. And Naga sometimes means snake. For Indians the holy snake is very beautiful, but for Western friends snake is a very bad sign. So we must translate it as the Holy Spirit. The four Sanghas are the Sangha of monks, the Sangha of nuns, the Sangha of laymen and the Sangha of laywomen.

We may think that there were three different jewels. But in fact the three jewels are one. We cannot divide them. There is the Buddha. But how can we have the Buddha if we don't have the Dharma, the methods to practice in order to make your Buddha become bigger and bigger every day. And how can you make your Buddha become bigger every day without the Sangha? So Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are one.

The Buddha said that there are six domains. The domain of spirit, the domain of attula, that is those who are very angry, the domain of beasts, the domain of hungry ghosts, the domain of those who live in hell, and the domain of humans. So when you recite the sutra you think that you recite for yourself, but maybe there are holy spirits who are coming and listening to you, and also attula and hungry ghosts too. So you have to recite properly, with dignity, with beauty. If you don't recite, don't do it. But if you do recite, do it with beauty, correctly, like you are a human who is reciting for all the six domains. And there are other living beings who come listening to this chanting, please support and protect them. When you read to this point, you must see the presence of six realms that are around us,

wrong we can hide it from some of our brothers and sisters in the Dharma, but we cannot hide from all the six realms around us who are trying to practice with us too.

"Protect us from the eight misfortunes." The eight misfortunes are situations in which the dharma is not available. The first one is hell. In hell nobody gives you a dharma talk. When you are a hungry ghost, you cannot easily receive the dharma. The third one is the realm of animals. The fourth is the deva realm, where living beings enjoy a lot of sensual pleasures. The fifth is a place very far away, remote, where the Dharma has difficulty to reach. The sixth is to be in a situation of misfortune where you cannot learn the Dharma. For example when you are deaf, when you cannot speak, when you are heavily handicapped, when you are blind, you cannot see the sutras, you cannot see the Dharma in that situation. The seventh is a place where people are very eloquent. There are monks who live peacefully, behave simply, have beautiful behavior, and he are "spiritual teachers" but although they speak eloquently it's very intellectual or like an eloquent lawyer. He can say something that is wrong and make it sound right. Among you there are those who have the seeds of eloquence. Be very careful.

Also there is misfortune like oppression, fire, flooding, and disaster these are un-favorable conditions for a practitioner. It's strange that the fifth accident is humans. Some humans are very naughty and try to prevent you from practicing the beautiful path. And there are those who are not human who also cause difficulties for you. Harmful bacteria, parasites, poisonous insects, small living beings who can kill you, who can cause difficulty to your practice. The eighth one is the government opposing you. And disease too. And the three paths are the three obscure paths: hell, hungry ghost and animal. You have to see that in each of us we have these three paths, and we also have the six realms in us. Don't think that these six kinds of living being are outside of you that the three paths are outside of you. They are in you. Only with mindfulness can you observe and you will transform.

The four objects of gratitude, four things that we feel grateful for are: parents and ancestors, teachers, friends and living beings. In the Vietnamese text it says, "impregnate with divine grace, heavenly grace." The three worlds are the world of desire, the world of form and the world of no-form.

"May there be no place in the world at war. May the winds be favorable, the rains seasonable and the people's hearts at peace. May the practice of the Sangha be steady and diligent, ascending the ten Bhumis without hardship." The ten Bhumis are the ten stages for becoming a bodhisattva. "May the Sangha-kaya live in peace and joy." The Maha-Sangha practices diligently. Maha-Sangha can mean five or six persons, and it means something like noble, great practice. A person who practices to be a bodhisattva has to go through ten Bhumis, ten stages.

The first one is the stage of joy, Mudita. The sign that you are on the way to become a bodhisattva is that you have a lot of joy. Looking at your face, at your behavior, people know that you have a lot of joy. That is one sign that you are a bodhisattva.

The second stage is purity. It means to be far away from all that is impure. All the impurities in your mind and your body are already transformed. When you look at your negative energies and you are able to transform them then you are entering into the second stage of a bodhisattva. You are distanced from the negative energy in you. If you can get away from the negative energies, it is thanks to the practice of the five mindfulness trainings, the fine manners and the precepts.

Then you arrive at the third stage that is emanating light. When you keep the mindfulness trainings properly and your mind is far away from all the negative energies, then you emanate a lot of light, freshness, solidity and freedom. People see that you have a lot of joy. When you see someone who practices mindfulness really beautifully it is as though that person is emanating light.

At the fourth stage your insight, your wisdom starts to be enlightened. Your deep vision, your deep insight starts to be illuminated and it makes all your ignorance, confusion, negative desires, cravings disappear. The Venerable Master Tang Hoi used to say: "Zen means burning all your afflictions."

Now we arrive to the fifth stage, winning against all difficulties. In your path there are always difficulties, but you can transcend all these difficulties, the difficulties, which are inside and those, which are outside. If you have difficulties, you don't care. Some difficulties are caused by your parents, your friends, and the negative situation of your body, your health. You transcend all you overcome all. Every time a difficulty arises, you overcome it.

The sixth stage is dwelling deeply in the present moment, one hundred percent in the present moment. You see the pure land in you and around you, and at the same time you see all the difficulties of life. But you are not shaken by them. You know that is life. You look deeply and gently, you try to overcome and transform it to the best of your ability.

The seventh stage is you go very far in the direction of saving people. After being in practice for a few weeks, we might think, "I know everything, breathing in, breathing out, walking in mindfulness, that I know, that's enough. So I don't need to go far." But we want to go far, we don't feel satisfied with just a bit of learning and practice."

The eighth bhumi is immobility. This means very deep stability. You are very stable; you are not shaken by anything. Even an earthquake will not shake you. Any big afflictions cannot affect you. Any craving, attraction cannot shake you. You arrive at a stage where nothing can shake you: anger, money, temptation of sex or fame, nothing can shake you, nothing can tempt you.

When you arrive at the ninth stage you are totally master of your mind. You act, you speak, you do everything in an effortless, beautiful way. When you open your mouth, it's only beautiful speech, when you act, it's only beautiful action. When you do everything, it is always naturally in a beautiful way.

And then you arrive at the tenth stage, the Dharma cloud stage. You are free like a cloud. Wherever you are joyful, you stop. When there are some difficulties, you transform. When something tempts you, you will not be tempted. It's very easy, you become like a cloud, not a normal cloud carried away by the wind, but a Dharma cloud.

"May the Sangha-kaya live in peace, joy and harmony." The word Sangha-kaya is mostly used only in Plum village. The sutras speak a lot about Buddha-kaya and Dharmakaya, but rarely about Sangha-kaya. I believe that Sangha-kaya is the best way to learn how to transcend our egocentricity, our tendency to be so sure of ourselves, and to practice the non-self training. Because if you live with the Sangha you see the wisdom that your sister in the Dharma is yourself, your brother in the Dharma is yourself. You see the lovely sister is yourself, you see the difficult brother is yourself and you practice to live in the Sangha.

You practice so that your Buddha-kaya, your Dharmakaya will be great every day. Kaya means body, Buddha-kaya is the body of the Buddha. Dharmakaya means body of the Dharma. The teaching will be great every day. Sangha-kaya, the body of the Sangha will be great every day. "May the Sangha-kaya live in peace, joy and harmony, the refuges and the precepts bringing happiness and wisdom." We need to live so that our Sangha-kaya will be fresh and new and joyful every day, so that everyone around us can take refuge properly in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha in themselves and practice the precepts properly to bring happiness and wisdom to themselves and those around.

In Buddhism we say that we try to practice two things, punya and prajña. Punya means you practice to obtain merit. And prajña means you practice to gain understanding. When you clean the house for the community, you garden a lot, you wash the dishes, you do a lot of hard work for the Sangha, you do merit work, punya. But if you do that work and are not carried away by your thinking, dwelling peacefully in the present moment one hundred percent, you obtain at the same time great understanding. So when we work or we help the hungry children, we obtain some merit, but if we do that work in order for great understanding to come and embrace everyone then that merit will be very great.

You practice everything with punya and prajña at the same time. When you clean the house, you do it not for cleaning the house but to practice to cultivate your concentration, to live deeply in the present moment, to be deeply present in every act. We call that practicing merit and understanding together. And the more we do it, the greater our merit. So while you are helping the Sangha by cleaning the house, doing the gardening, cutting the wood, shopping, cooking, this is only merit work, and merit work is very little. But if you do it with mindfulness, you live deeply the present moment, you are not carried away by anger, hatred, and dispersion then you practice prajña at the same time. Enlightenment work and merit work must go together and nothing can shake you.

"The wisdom of awakened mind shines like the full moon." We practice so that we will be the mind and body of the Buddha. "The mind of the Buddha is always clear like the full moon. The body of a Buddha is pure like crystal. The Buddha living in the world always tries to save others. Wherever there is the mind of the Buddha there is compassion and love. Namo Shakyamuni Buddha." Our respect to Gautama Buddha. Muni is monk; Sakya is the

family name of Gautama Buddha. Shakyamuni is the monk Sakya. If you visit my hermitage, you'll see a bowl made of clay. It was offered to me in India by a monk who also has the family name Sakya. (The bowl is in the Upper Hamlet now.) Ten years ago I visited Lumbini, the place where the Buddha was born and I met with this monk who has the same family name, Sakya, as Gautama Buddha. He appeared and he said: "I heard that you were coming. I've been waiting for you for several days already, to give you this bowl." And he gave me this bowl of clay and a sanghati. I don't know why. I arrived silently; there was no advertisement of my coming to Lumbini at all. We came like an unknown group of people making a pilgrimage. But when we arrived, that monk said: "I've been waiting for you and I offer you this bowl and this sanghati robe."

When you want to show respect to a Buddha statue or a shrine, according to the tradition in India, when you put your sanghati on you have the right shoulder bare, free and then you walk around the Buddha and you have to go in a clockwise direction with that shoulder facing inward. If you go in the wrong direction they know that you don't know Buddhist tradition. You walk mindfully around the Buddha. According to Vietnamese tradition, you join the palms when you walk in kinh hanh, (slow walking meditation), but in the West you may join your palms if you wish, but it's okay not to. But when you evoke the name of the Buddha or Avalokitesvara, you have to join the palms. We try to do it that way to show our respect. To show your respect is to practice merit, but when you walk mindfully without letting your mind go in ten directions you also practice enlightenment. And merit and enlightenment work must go together.

**Dear Friends,**

**These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.**

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# Philosophy of Dreams

*By*

[Sri Swami Sivananda](#)

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## **Publishers' Note**

Though Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj is an Advaita Vedantin of Sri Sankara's School, he is unique in that in his life and teachings he synthesises the highest idealism and dynamic practical life. His "Divine Life" is ideal life, ideal and divine only because it is possible to live it here and now.

The sage, therefore, has directed the beam of his divine light on all problems that face man. Not confining himself to the exposition of philosophy and Yoga, he has enriched our literature in other fields, too, e.g., medicine, health and hygiene and even "How to Become Rich."

And now we have from his divine pen his inspiring and enlightened thoughts on one of the most interesting phenomena viz., dreams. He has viewed dreams from several angles and thrown such a flood of light on it as to expose not only its unreality, but also the unreality of the waking state. Thus the sage leads us to the Supreme Reality that alone exists.

16th February, 1958.  
Maha Sivaratri Day

THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY

## **Introduction**

The analysis of dreams and their cause by psychoanalysts are defective. They maintain that the cause of dream creation lies in the suppressed desires of the dreamer. Can they create dreams as they like by suppressing desires? No, they cannot do that. They say that desires stimulate or help the dream creation. But they do not know what supplies the material out of which they are made and what turns the desires into actual expression, enabling the dreamer see his own suppressed desires materialised and appearing to him as real.

The desires only supply the impulse. The mind creates the dream out of the materials supplied by the experiences of the waking state. The dream creatures spring up from the bed of Samskaras or impressions in the subconscious mind. Indigestion also causes dream. The Taijasa is the dreamer. It is the waking personality that creates the dream personality. The dream personality exists as the object of the waking personality and is real only as such.

The waking and dreaming states do not exist independently side by side as real units.

Why do we dream? Various answers have been given to this question. Dreams are nothing but a reflection of our waking experience in a new form. The medical view is that dreams are due to some organic disturbances somewhere in the body, but more particularly in the stomach. Sometimes coming diseases appear in dreams.

not responsible for the production of dreams. The dream mechanism is very intricate. The wishes are of an immoral nature. They are revolting to the moral self, which exercises a control on their appearance. Therefore, the wishes appear in disguised forms to evade the moral censor. Very few dreams present the wishes as they really are. Dreams are partial gratification of the wishes. They relieve the mental tension and thus enable us to enjoy repose. They are safety valves to strong impulsions. You will know your animal-self in dream.

The objects which manifest during the dreaming state are often not different in many respects from those which one perceives during his waking state. During the dreaming state he talks with the members of his family and friends, eats the same food, behold rivers, mountains, motor cars, gardens, streets, ocean, temples, works in the office, answers question papers in the examination hall, and fights and quarrels with some people. This shows that man does not abandon the results of his past relation with objects when he falls asleep.

The person who experiences the three states, viz., Jagrat or waking-state, Svapna or the dreaming state, and Sushupti or deep-sleep state is called Visva in the waking state, Taijasa in the dreaming state and Prajna in the deep sleep state. When one gets up from sleep, it is Visva who remembers the experience of Prajna in deep sleep and says, "I slept soundly. I do not know anything." Otherwise remembrance of the enjoyment in deep sleep is not possible.

The reactions to dreams differ according to mental disposition, temperament and diet of the person.

All dreams are affairs of mere seconds. Within ten seconds you will experience dreams wherein the events of several years happen.

Some get dreams occasionally, while some others experience dreams daily. They can never have sleep without dreams.

The sun is the source and the temporary resting place of its rays. The rays emanate from the sun and spread in all directions at the time of sunrise. They enter into the sun at sunset, lose themselves there and come out again at the next sunrise. Even so the state of wakefulness and dream come out from the state of deep sleep and re-enter it and lose themselves there to follow the same course again.

Whatever appears in the dream world is the reproduction of the waking world. It is not only the reproduction of the objects seen, experienced or dealt with in the present life, but it may be the reproduction of objects seen, experienced or dealt with in any former life in the present world. Therefore the dream world cannot be said to be independent of the waking world.

The objects that are seen in the state of wakefulness are always seen outside the body. It is, therefore, external to the dreamer, while the dream world is always internal to the dreamer. That is the only difference between them.

During the dream state the whole wakeful world loses itself in the dream state. Therefore, it is not possible to find the distinctive features that would help the dreamer to distinguish the waking world from the dream world.

Scientists and Western philosophers draw their conclusions from the observations of their waking experience. Whereas the Vedantins utilise the experiences of the three states viz., waking, dream and deep sleep and then draw their conclusions. Hence the latter's conclusions are true, correct, perfect, full and integral, while those of the former are partial and one sided.

Certain kinds of external sounds such as the ringing of a bell, the noise of alarm-clock, knocks on the door or the wall, the blowing of wind, the drizzling of rain, the rustling of leaves, the blowing of the horn of a motor car, the cracking of the window etc., may produce in the mind of the dreamer variety of imaginations. They generate certain sensations, which increase according to the power of imagination of the sleeper and the sensitiveness of his mind. These sounds cause very elaborate dreams.

If you touch the dreamers' chest with the point of a pin, he may dream that some one has given him a severe blow on his body or stabbed him with a dagger.

The individual soul does not know that he is dreaming during his dream state and is not conscious of himself as he

effect of the workings of the impressions (Samskaras) of his waking state.

It is possible for a dreamer to remain cognisant during his dream state of the fact that he is dreaming. Learn to be the witness of your thoughts in the waking state. You can be conscious in the dream state that you are dreaming. You can alter, stop or create your own thoughts in the dream state independently. You will be able to keep awake in the dream state. If the thoughts of the waking state are controlled, you can also control the dream thoughts.

Sometimes the dreams are very interesting and turn out to be true. They foretell events. A man living in Haridwar dreamt on the first January 1947 that he will be in Benares on the night of the third January. It really turned out to be true. An officer dreams that he will be transferred to Allahabad. In the following morning he gets the transfer order. Another man dreams that he will meet with a motorcar accident on the coming Saturday. It also turns out to be true.

Profound wisdom comes through reflection on dreams. No one has known himself truly who has not studied his dreams. The study of dreams shows how mysterious is our soul. Dreams reveal to us that aspect of our nature, which transcends rational knowledge. Every dream presentation has a meaning. A dream is like a letter written in an unknown language.

Many riddles of life are solved through hints from dreams. Dreams indicate which way the spiritual life of a man is flowing. One may receive proper advice for self-correction through dreams. One may know how to act in a particular situation through dreams. The dreams point out a path unknown to the waking consciousness. Saints and sages appear in dreams during times of difficulty and point out the way.

The Vedantins study very deeply and carefully the states of dreams and deep sleep and logically prove that the waking state is as unreal as the dream state. They declare that the only difference between the two states is that the waking state is a long dream, Deergha Svapna.

So long as the dreamer dreams, dream-objects are real. When he wakes up the dream world becomes false. When one attains illumination or knowledge of Brahman, this wakeful world becomes as unreal as the dream world.

The real truth is that nobody sleeps, dreams or wakes up, because there is no reality in these states.

Transcend the three states and rest in the fourth state of Turiya, the eternal bliss of Brahman, Satchidananda Svaroop.

*Swami Sivananda*

## 1. Songs Of Dream

Guru Guru Japna  
    Aur Sab Svapna,  
Guru Guru Japna  
    Jagat Deergha Svapna.

Jagat Deergha Svapna  
    The world is like a long dream.  
Take shelter in Guru  
    Everything is unreal. (Guru Guru)

**Antarai**

When you perceive the things in Dream  
    You take them all to be real,  
When you wake up and perceive  
    They are all false and unreal. (Guru Guru)

The world of name and forms is like



The dream you have during the night,  
You take them all as real things,  
But they are only false and transient (Guru Guru)

The only one which really exists  
Is that God with Brahmic Splendour  
Wake up, wake up, wake up to Light,  
Wake up, wake up, from Maya's sleep,  
And see the things in their proper light. (Guru Guru)

## 2. Dream

Svapna is the dreaming state in which man enjoys the five objects of senses and all the senses are at rest and the mind alone works. Mind itself is the subject and the object. It creates all dream-pictures. Jiva is called Taijasa in this state. There is Antah-Prajna (internal consciousness). The scripture says, "When he falls asleep, there are no chariots in that state, no horses and roads, but he himself creates *chariots*, horses and roads."

The dreaming world is separate from the waking one. The man sleeping on a cot in Calcutta, quite healthy at the time of going to bed, wanders in Delhi as a sickly man in the dream world and vice versa. Deep sleep is separate from both the dreaming and the waking world. To the dreamer the dream world and the dream objects are as much real as the objects and experiences of the waking world. A dreaming man is not aware of the unreality of the dream world. He is not aware of the existence of the waking world, apart from the dream. Consciousness changes. This change in consciousness brings about either the waking or the dream experiences. The objects do not change in themselves. There is only change in the mind. The mind itself plays the role of the waking and the dream.

The dreamer feels that the dreams are real so long as they last, however incoherent they may be. He dreams sometimes that his head has been cut off and that he is flying in the air.

The dreamer believes in the reality of the dream as well as the different experiences in the dream. Only when he wakes up from the dream, he knows or realises that what he has experienced was mere dream, illusion and false. Similar is the case with the Jiva in the waking world. The ignorant Jiva imagines that the phenomenal world of sense-pleasure is real. But when he is awakened to the reality of things, when his angle of vision is changed, when the screen of Avidya is removed, he realises that this waking world also is unreal like the dream world.

In dream a poor man becomes a mighty potentate. He enjoys various sorts of pleasures. He marries a Maharani, lives in a magnificent palace and begets several children. He gives his eldest daughter in marriage to the son of a Maha-Raja. He goes to the Continent along with this wife and children. Then he returns and visits various places of pilgrimage. He dies of pneumonia at Benares. Within five minutes, he gets the above experiences. What a great marvel!

As in dream, so in the waking, the objects seen are unsubstantial, though the two conditions differ by the one being internal and subtle, and the other external, gross and long. The wise consider the wakeful as well as the dreaming condition as one, in consequence of the similarity of the objective experience in either case. As are dream and illusion a castle in the air, so say the wise, the Vedanta declares this cosmos to be.

Dreams represent the contraries. A king who has plenty of food, dreams that he is begging for his food in the streets. A chaste, pure aspirant dreams that he is suffering from venereal disease. A chivalrous soldier dreams that he is running from the battlefield for fear of enemy. A weak sickly man dreams that he is dead. He dreams also that his living father is dead and weeps in the night. He also experiences that he is attending the cremation of his father. Sometimes a man who lives in the city dreams that he is facing a tiger and a lion and shrieks loudly at night. He takes his pillow thinking it to be his trunk and proceeds to the Railway Station. After walking a short distance he takes it to be a dream and comes back to his house. Some people dream that they are sitting in the toilet and actually micturate in their beds.

As soon as you wake up, the dream becomes unreal. The waking state does not exist in the dream. Both dream and

three states are unreal. They are caused by the three qualities: Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Brahman or the Absolute is the silent witness of the three states. It transcends the three qualities also. It is pure bliss and pure consciousness. It is Existence Absolute.

### 3. Study of Dream-State

Once a disciple approached his Guru, prostrated at His Lotus Feet and with folded hands put the question:

**Disciple:** O My Revered Guru! Please tell me the way to cross this cycle of births and deaths.

**Guru:** My dear disciple! If you can understand who you are, then you can get over this cycle of births and deaths.

**Disciple:** O Guru! I am not so foolish as not to understand me. There is no man on earth who does not understand himself; but every one of them is having his rounds of birth and death.

**Guru:** No, No. You should understand the nature between the body and that person for whom this body is intended. Then only any one is said to have understood himself.

**Disciple:** Who is the person to whom this body belongs?

**Guru:** This Deha (body) belongs to the Dehi (Atman). Try to understand the true nature of the Atman.

**Disciple:** I do not see anybody besides this body.

**Guru:** When this body was asleep, who is the person who experienced your dreams? Again in deep sleep who is he that enjoyed it? When you wake up, who is he that is conscious of the world, your dreams and the soundness of the deep sleep?

**Disciple:** I am just beginning to have a little idea of the nature of Atman who is present in all the three states.

From the above conversation between the Guru and the disciple, it is clear that the dream and the deep sleep states are worthy of our study in order to understand the true nature of the Atman, as we already pretend to have some knowledge at least of our waking consciousness.

Dream is but a disturbance of the deep sleep and the study of the former, as to its origin, working, purpose and meaning will naturally lead us to the study of the deep sleep state also.

The best way to study a subject is to trace its history and development in the hands of eminent authors and to focus our critical faculty on what we have studied from their treatises and to rectify any omissions, when we shall have a complete and satisfactory survey of that subject.

The dream reveals within itself those unconscious mental mechanisms evolved during the course of development for the purpose of controlling and shaping the primitive instinctual self towards that form of behaviour demanded by the contemporary civilization. A working knowledge of the dream as a typical functioning of the psyche—that is, a knowledge of the dream mechanisms and of the theory of the unconscious symbolism—is therefore indispensable for dream interpretation. This knowledge may be gained intellectually from the books written by authorities on that subject, but emotional conviction is the result only of personal analytic experience. Dream should be considered as an individual psychical product from the storehouse of specific experience, which indeed the dreamer may in consciousness neither remember nor know that he knows.

In the analysis of a dream, one would say that the assimilation of knowledge of the unconscious mind through the ego is an essential part of the psychical process. The principle involved in valid explanation is the revelation of the unknown, implicit in the known in terms of the individual. This principle underlies all true dream interpretations.

The value of a dream therefore lies not only in discovering the latest material by means of the manifest content, but

The subject of “dream” and its analysis will be, therefore, a most interesting one in understanding the true nature of the individual. We, therefore, quote in the following pages, relevant extracts from the lectures of Sigmund Freud, the famous authority on that subject and will evolve it further, if necessary, by the help of the knowledge we get from the Indian Sages and Seers.

## **4. Dream Philosophy**

Certain Karmas are worked out in dreams also. A King experienced a dream in which he acts the part of a beggar and suffers the pangs of starvation. Certain evil Karmas of the King are purged out in this experience.

If a man is not able to become a king on account of evil influence of some planets, he plays the part of a king in his dream. His strong desire materialises in the dream state.

One derives more pleasure in dream than in the waking state when he experiences pleasant dreams because the mind works more freely in dream.

If you have made arrangements to go to Bombay in the morning of 30th April, you may experience a dream on the night of 29th itself that you are purchasing a ticket at the station and entering the train and some friends have come on the platform of Bombay station to receive you. The strong thoughts of the waking state find expression at once in the dreaming state.

When a strong desire is not gratified in the waking state, you obtain its gratification in dream. The mind has more freedom in the dreaming state. The mind is then like a furious elephant let loose.

## **5. Philosophy of Dream**

### **I**

One dreams many things that are never to be experienced in this life such as “He dreams he is flying in the air.”

A dream is not an entirely new experience, because most often it is the memory of past experiences.

In the waking state the light of the self is mixed up with the functions of the organs, intellect, mind, external lights etc. In dreams the self becomes distinct and isolated as the organs do not act and the lights such as the sun that help them are absent.

The dreamer is not affected by whatever result of the good and evil he sees in the dream state. No one regards himself a sinner on account of the sins committed in dreams. People who have heard of them do not condemn or shun them. Hence he is not touched by them.

The dreamer only appears to be doing things in dream but actually there is no activity. The Sruti says, “He seems to be enjoying himself in the company of women.” (Bri. Up. IV. iii. 13.) He who described his dream experiences uses the words ‘as if’; “I saw today as if a herd of elephants was running.” Therefore the dreaming self has no activity in dreams.

An action is done by the contact of the body and the senses, which have form with something else that has form. We never see a formless thing being active. The Self is formless. Therefore it is not attached. As this Self is unattached, it is untouched by what it beholds in dreams. Hence we cannot ascribe activity to it, as activity proceeds from the contact of the body and the organs. There is no contact for the Self, because this infinite Self is unattached. Therefore it is immortal.

Doctors say, “Do not wake him up suddenly or violently”, because they see that in dreams the self goes out of the body of the waking state through the gates of the organs and remains isolated outside. If the self is violently aroused

it may not find those gates of the organs. If he does not find the right organ the body becomes difficult to doctor. The self may not get back to those gates of the organs, things which it sent out taking the shining functions of the latter, or it may misplace those functions. In that case defects such as blindness and deafness may result. The doctor may find it difficult to treat them.

## II

Dreams are due to mental impressions (Vasanas) received in the waking state. The consciousness in a dream depends on the previous knowledge acquired in the wakeful state.

The dreams have the purpose of either cheering or saddening and frightening the sleeper, so as to requite him for his good and evil deeds. His *Adrishta* thus furnishes the efficient cause of the dreams.

Even in the state of dream the instruments of the self are not altogether at rest, because scripture states that even then it is connected with Buddhi (intellect). “Having become a dream, together with Buddhi it passes beyond this world.”

Smriti also says, “When the senses being at rest, the mind not being at rest, is occupied with the objects, know that state to be a dream.”

Scripture says that desires etc. are modifications of the mind (Bri, Up. I-v-3). Desires are observed in dreams. Therefore, the self wanders about in dreams together with the mind only.

The scripture in describing our doings in dreams qualifies them by an ‘as it were’. “As it were rejoicing together with women, or laughing as it were, or seeing terrible sights” (Bri. Up. IV-iii-13). Ordinary people also describe the dreams in the same manner. “I ascended as it were the summit of a mountain, I saw a tree, as it were”.

Dream creation is unreal. Reality implies the factors of time, space and causation. Further, reality cannot be sublated or stultified. Dream creation has not got these traits.

Dream is called ‘Sandhya’ or the intermediate state because it is midway between waking and the deep sleep state, between the Jagrat and the Sushupti.

## III

Dreams, though of a strange and illusory nature, are a good index of the high or low spiritual and moral condition of the dreamer. He, who has a pure heart and untainted character, will never get impure dreams. An aspirant who is ever meditating will dream of his Sadhana and his object of meditation. He will do worship of the Lord and recite His name and Mantra even in dream through the force of Samskara.

## 6. Who is it That Dreams?

If you ask any man in this world, “Who is it that wakes up? Who is it that dreams? And who is it that sleeps?” He will answer, “It is I that wake up; it is I that dream; it is I that sleep.” If you ask him “What is this I?” he will say, “this body is the ‘I’.” He will tell you that it is the body that sleeps. When the brain is tired or exhausted, it is the body that sleeps; when the brain is disturbed, it is the body that dreams; and when the brain is refreshed, it is the body that wakes up after sound sleep.

A psychologist who has made a special study of the mind will say that the mind, which has its seat in the brain, is the ‘I’. He says that the mind is inseparable from the brain and it perishes along with the physical body.

The metaphysicians and the spiritualists hold that the mind continues to exist somewhere after the death of the body. According to psychologists, metaphysicians and spiritualists it is the mind that wakes up, dreams and sleeps and this mind is the ‘I’.

A Theologist says that there is a soul which is quite independent of the body and the mind and it is this soul that

Karma.

A Vedantin says that neither this body nor the mind nor the soul is the 'I'. There is one pure consciousness or Atman in all beings which is Infinite, Eternal, all-pervading, self-existent, self-luminous and self-contained which is partless, timeless, spaceless, birthless, and deathless. This is the real 'I'. This 'I' never wakes, dreams or sleeps. It is always the seer or the silent witness (Sakshi) of the three states of waking, dreaming and sleeping. It is the Turiya or the fourth state. It is the state that transcends the three states.

It is the false or relative 'I' called Ahamkara or ego or that Jiva that wakes up, dreams and sleeps. The waker, the dreamer and the sleeper are all changing personalities and unreal.

The real self, the real 'I' never wakes up, dreams and sleeps. From the point of the Absolute Truth or Paramartha Satta no one wakes up, dreams and sleeps.

## **7. Lord Creates Dream Objects**

**(Another view)**

Some Indian philosophers hold that the creation of chariots etc. in the dream is verily by the Lord and not by the human self. The dream objects are created by the Lord as fruition of the minor works of the Jiva. In order to reward the soul for very minor Karmas, the Lord creates the dreams.

The followers of one Sakha, namely the Kathakas, state in their text that the Supreme Lord is alone the Creator of all Karmas in the dream state for the dreamers (Katha Up. V-8).

“He, the Highest Person, who is awake in us when we are asleep, shaping one lovely sight after another, that indeed is the Bright, that is Brahman, that alone is called the Immortal. All worlds are contained in Him, and no one goes beyond Him. This is that.”

Maya or the will of the Lord is the only means through which He creates dream objects. They are not made of objective matter (gross elements) because they are not perceptible to all persons, but are seen only by the dreamer.

He who can cause the bondage and release of the soul can easily bring about the dream and its withdrawal for the soul. There is nothing wonderful in it. Kurma Purana says: “It is He (the Lord) who makes the soul perceive the dream creation etc. and it is He who hides them from his view; for on His will the bondage and release of the soul depend.”

## **8. Prophetic Dreams**

Sometimes dreams are prophetic of future good and bad fortune. The scripture teaches, “When a man engaged in some work undertakes for a special wish, sees in his dreams a woman, he may infer success from that dream vision”. “Then having washed the Mantha vessel which should be either of bell-metal or of wood, let him lie down behind the fire on a skin or on a bare ground silently and singly. If in his dreams he sees a woman, let him know this is an omen that his sacrifice has been successful”. (Chh. Up. V-2-8-9).

Other scriptural passages declare that certain dreams indicate speedy death e.g. “If he sees a black man with black teeth, that man will kill him” (Kaushitaki Brahmana.)

Those who also understand the science of dreams hold the opinion that the dream of riding on an elephant and the like is lucky; while it is unlucky to dream of riding on a donkey.

Lord Siva taught Visvamitra in dream the Mantra called “Ramaraksha”. He exactly wrote it out in the morning

Works of genius like poems etc. are found in dreams. Remedies for diseases are prescribed in the dream. Sometimes the exact object seen in dreams is seen afterwards in waking state.

Vyasa and other sages who know the science of dreams say, “Whatever a Brahmin or a God, a bull or a king may tell a person in dreams will doubtless prove true”.

Ramanuja holds, “Because the images of a dream are produced by the Highest Lord Himself, therefore, they have prophetic significance.”

## **9. Spiritual Enlightenment Through Dreams**

“He who is happy within, who rejoices within, and who is illumined within, that Yogi attains absolute freedom or Moksha, himself becoming Brahman.” (Gita: V-24.) The highest spiritual knowledge is Knowledge of the Self. He who has known himself, rather his self, for him nothing remains to be known. The wisest of the Western philosophers Socrates, gave the highest and the best of his teachings to his disciples in the injunction “Know Thyself”. The Indian saints likewise gave their highest teaching in the form known as Adhyatma-Vidya or Self-Knowledge.

Knowledge of the Self, which has been called the supreme knowledge by the wise men of all ages, has seldom been recognised as a mystery by the ordinary man. He seems to know himself so well that he does not think it even necessary to reflect upon himself. Not only does the uneducated illiterate person think it useless to reflect upon himself, but the highly cultured modern man also thinks in the same way. The greater the advancement of science and learning, the less we find in the modern man a desire to know himself.

There are two opposite reasons that lead a man not to reflect upon himself: first, he thinks that he knows the self too well, secondly he thinks it useless to think about himself, because the true nature of the self can never be known. Some think that thinking about oneself is a morbid mentality. This is a form of introversion from which one has to free oneself as soon as possible. The study of dreams is corrective to such an erroneous view.

There was a time when psychologists thought, the less we thought about our dreams, the better. The psychologists who take consciousness to be an epi-phenomenon still hold the same view. Seashore, for instance, thinks that it is only abnormal people who think too much of their dreams, and that thinking too much about dreams leads to abnormalities. There is much in the waking life to be attended to and he who spends his time in thinking about his dreams is missing so much of his waking life and this contributes to his own failure in life.

Now Psychology, however, has changed this point of view. It shows that deepest wisdom comes through reflection on dreams. No one has known himself truly, who has not studied his dreams. The study of dreams at once shows what a great mystery our soul is, and that this mystery is not altogether insoluble, as some metaphysicians supposed. Dreams reveal to us that aspect of our nature which transcends rational knowledge. That in the most rational and moral man there is an aspect of his being which is absurd and immoral, one knows only through the study of one's dreams. All our pride of nationality and morality melts into nothingness as soon as we reflect upon our dreams.

There is logic in our dreams or rather the logic of our waking consciousness is just like the dream logic. The great philosopher Hegel constructed his logic without taking into account what the dream logic has to reveal. Now logic, which at the same time claims to be a system of Metaphysics, cannot be complete without taking into account the absurd constructions of dream experience. Logic is only a tool of intellect, which enables it to deal with the waking experience alone. This fact is revealed to us through the study of our dreams. The real must transcend all logical categories; or the categories by which it can be comprehended have to be such as will not only suffice to catch the waking experience but the dream experience too. This simply means that it should be broad enough to comprehend both the conscious and the unconscious life of a man. To conceive of such a category cannot be the work of waking consciousness. Such a category must necessarily transcend both the waking and the dream consciousness. Thus we are lead to the necessity of intuition or a logical thought to comprehend Reality, when we begin reflecting upon our dreams.

The modern study of dreams shows that they are not meaningless presentations. Every dream presentation has a

meaning. A dream is like a letter written in an unknown language. To a man who does not know the Chinese, a letter written in that language is a meaningless scroll. But to one who knows that language it is full of most valuable information. It may be the letter calls for immediate action; or it may contain words of consultation to one suffering from dejection. It may be a letter of threat or it may speak of love. These meanings are there only to one who would care to attend to the letter and would try to decipher it. But alas! How few of us try to understand these messages from the deep unseen ocean of our own Consciousness!

Why do we dream? Various answers have been given to this question. According to the most popular scientific view, dreams are nothing but a repetition of our waking experiences in a new form. A more thoughtful view regards them as productions of an organic disturbance somewhere in the body, but more particularly in the stomach. To this view medical men stick more tenaciously than any other people. Sometimes coming diseases appear in dreams. During an illness dreams are generally more horrible than they are in the healthy condition of the body. These are all scientific theories of dreams. We have here out of account the unscientific theories, e.g. that dreams are premonitions or that gods or demons or spirits produce dreams, or that the soul goes out to a sojourn in dreams etc.

The scientific theories have been very thoroughly exposed by Dr. Sigmund Freud in his Interpretation of Dreams. No physical stimulus, whether it is inside or outside the body, no experience of the waking or sleeping state can explain the presentation of the actual dream content. The same stimulus, namely the chime of an alarm timepiece produced three different kinds of dreams to Hidetrant at different times. Why should it be so if the physical stimulus alone is responsible for the production of dreams?

According to Freud all dreams, without any exception, are wish fulfilment. The wishes are actually of an immoral nature. They are revolting to the moral self, which exercises a control on their appearance. Hence to evade this moral censor the wishes appear in disguised forms. The dream mechanism is very intricate. Very few dreams present the wishes as they really are. Dreams are partial gratification of the wishes. They relieve the mental tension, and thus enable us to enjoy repose. They are safety valves to strong impulsions. Dreams do not disturb sleep but rather protect it. The irrationality and the immorality of dreams make the morality and rationality of our waking life possible.

The above statement of Freud shows that we know our animal self in dream. But he does not say anything about the spiritual life being expressed in dream. This, it seems, has been done by Jung. According to Jung, a dream is not causally determined as was supposed by Freud, but it is teleologically determined. The repressed wishes alone do not explain all our dreams. A dream presents a demand to our waking consciousness. If rightly interpreted, it shows the way to be at peace with ourselves. The dreams of the neurotics not only reveal the repressed contents but they also suggest remedies for the cure. A series of dreams sometimes occur to a patient, which reveal the way to cure.

The dream consciousness is superior to the waking consciousness in many respects. Many puzzles of life are solved through hints from dreams. All dreams, according to Adler, are anticipatory in character. They show which way the spiritual life of a man is flowing. To know the actual flow is necessary to correct possible errors. Dreams help us to discover the lifeline of the individual and help us to give him proper advice for self-correction.

Thus, through dreams one may know how one ought to act in a particular situation. The dreams point out a path unknown to the waking consciousness. Saints and sages appear in dreams at times of difficulty and show the way. The more one follows the dream intuitions, the clear they become.

## **10. Waking as a Dream**

In both states—waking and dreaming—objects are “Perceived”, i.e., are associated with subject-object relationship. This is the similarity between the two.

The only difference between the two states is that the objects in dream are perceived in the space within the body, whereas in the waking condition they are seen in the space outside the body. The fact of “being seen” and their consequent illusoriness are common to both states.

The illusion of both the states is established by their “being seen” as “object”, other than the self, thus creating a

difference in existence. Anything that is “perceived” is unreal, for perception presupposes relation and relation is non-eternal, for the relations of the waking state are contradicted by those of dream and vice versa. As duality is unreal, all objects must be unreal.

As long as the dream lasts, waking is unreal; as long as waking lasts, dream is unreal. The reality of the one is dependent on the reality of the other. But dream is proved to be unreal; hence waking also is unreal.

Dream-relations are contradicted by waking-relations. Waking relations are contradicted by Super-consciousness which is uncontradicted. Non-contradiction is the test of reality.

That which persists forever is real. That which does not and which has a beginning and an end is unreal. Dream and waking have both a beginning and an end. But it may be contented that one thing exists as the cause of the other in the beginning. But as causality itself is baseless, a thing cannot exist as the cause of another. That which has a beginning and an end is changeable and hence non-eternal and unreal, for change implies non-existence in the beginning or at an end. Hence all perceived objects are unreal.

As the objects of the waking state do not work in dream, they are unreal. As the objects of the dream do not work in the waking state, they are unreal. Hence everything is unreal. One who eats belly-full during the waking state feels hungry in the dream state and vice versa. Things are real only in their own realms and not always. That which is not always real is unreal, for reality is everlasting.

The perception of an object is unreal, because the objects are creations of the mind. An object has got a particular form, because the mind believes it to be so. In fact, the objects of both the dreaming and the waking states are unreal. An object lasts only as long as the particular mental condition cognising the object lasts. When there is a different mental condition altogether, the objects also change. Hence all objects are unreal.

Both in the dream and in the waking state, the internal perceptions are unreal and the objects of external perception appear to be real.

If in the waking state we make a distinction of real and unreal, in dream also we do the same thing. In dream also objects of internal cognition, are unreal. Dream is as real as the waking state. But since dream is proved to be unreal, waking also must be unreal. Dream is unreal only from the standpoint of waking, and equally so is waking to the dreamer. From the standpoint of True Wisdom, waking is as unreal as dream.

## **11. The Unreality of Imagination**

Through the play of the mind in dreams and deliriums nearness appears as a great distance and a great distance appears as proximity. Through the force of the mind a great cycle of time appears as a moment and a moment appears as a great cycle. The unreal world appears as real whereas it is in reality a long dream arisen in our mind. This world is nothing but a long dream. The mind sports and creates an illusion. Through the play of the mind the dream-world appears as real. The following story will illustrate this fact.

Lavana was a king of the country of Uttara Pandava. He was once seated on his throne. All his ministers and officers were present. There appeared at this time a Siddha or a magician. He bowed down to the king and said, “O Lord! Deign to behold my wonderful feats.” The Siddha waved his bunch of peacock feathers. The king had the following experiences. A messenger from the king of Sindhu entered the court with a horse like that of Indra and said, “O Lord! My master has made a present of this horse to you.” The Siddha requested the king to mount upon the horse and ride it at his pleasure. The king stared at the horse and entered into a state of trance for two hours. Afterwards there was relaxation of rigidity of his body. The king’s body fell on the ground after some time. The courtiers lifted the body. The king gradually came to consciousness. The ministers and the courtiers said to the king: “What is the matter with your majesty?” The king said: “The Siddha waved his bunch of peacock’s feathers. I saw a horse before me. I mounted on the horse and rode in a desert in the hot sun. My tongue was parched. I was quite fatigued. Then I reached a beautiful forest. While I was riding on the horse, a creeper encircled my neck and the horse ran away. I was rocking to and fro in the air during the whole of the night with the creeper encircling my



“The day dawned and I saw the sun. I cut the creeper that encircled my neck. I then beheld an outcaste girl carrying some food and water in her hands. I was very hungry and asked her to give me some food. She did not give me anything. I followed her closely for a long time. She then turned to me and said: “I am a Chandala by birth. If you promise to marry me in my own place before my parents and live with me there, I will give you what I have in my hand this very moment.” I agreed to marry her. She then gave me half of the food. I ate the food and drank the beverage of Jambu fruits.

“Then she took me to her father and asked his permission to marry me. He consented. Then she took me to her abode. The father of the girl killed monkeys, cows and pigs for flesh and dried them on the strings of nerves. A small shed was erected. I had then my seat on a big plantain leaf. My squint-eyed mother-in-law then looked at me with her blood-red eyeballs and said, “Is this our would-be son-in-law?”

“The marriage festivities began with great *éclat*. My father-in-law presented me clothes and other articles. Toddy and meat were freely distributed. The meat-eating Chandalas beat their drums. The girl was given to me in marriage. I was named as ‘Pushta.’ The wedding festival lasted for seven days. A daughter was first born of this union. She brought forth again a black boy in the course of three years. She again gave birth to a daughter. I became an old Chandala with a large family and lived for a long time. Children are a source of grief. Miseries of human beings which arise out of passion take the form of a child. My body became old and emaciated on account of family cares and worries. I had to undergo pain through heat and cold in the dreary forest. I was clad in old ragged clothes. I carried loads of firewood on my head. I was exposed to the chill winds. I had to live upon the roots. I thus spent sixty years of my life as if they were so many Kalpa-ages of long duration. There was severe famine. Many died of starvation. Some of my relatives left the place.

“I and my wife left the country and walked in the hot sun. I carried two children on my shoulders and third on my head. I walked a long distance and then arrived at the fringe of a forest. We all took a little rest under a big palmyra tree. My wife expired on account of long travel in the hot sun. My younger son Pracheka rose up and stood before me and said with tears gushing out of his eyes: “Papa, I am hungry. Give me immediately some meat and drink or else I will die.” He repeatedly said with tears in his eyes that he was dying of hunger. I was then moved by paternal affection. I was very much afflicted at heart. I was not able to bear the distress. Then I made up my mind to put an end to my life by falling into fire. I collected some wood, heaped them together and set fire to them. I stood up to jump into the fire when I fell down from throne and woke up. I now find myself as the king Lavana once again and not as a Chandala.”

This story illustrates the heterogeneous actions of the mind. The experiences of the state of trance or delirium, the experiences in the waking state and those in dream are all similar. The Samskaras are ingrained in the mind equally in all the states of consciousness. The misery of Samsara is equally felt in all the states of the mind when it is vigorously working. Whatever we see is only a manifestation of the mind. It is quite illusory. Time is but a mode of mind. Centuries are passed for but five minutes and vice versa. Within two hours, king Lavana had experienced such a diverse life of sixty years.

None can say whether his life as king was true or as Chandala. Whether this is a dream or that is a dream we cannot say. Instead of thinking that the king dreamt of a life as Chandala, we can as well consider that a real Chandala dreamt that he was king Lavana. Both are unintelligible and unreal modes of imagination. Our whole life on earth is a similar play of imagination. Our states of consciousness contradict themselves when we try to reconcile them. We cannot say whether we are dreaming or waking. To us every state of imagination seems to be real. We may be in this world building castles in the air while sleeping on the bed in some other world. Nothing can be given as a proof for the reality of the world in which we live. If all of us now experience a common world it may be due to an apparent accident in the similarity of the states of consciousness in us. And moreover there is no guarantee that all of us look at the world in the same fashion. The world changes from person to person and to the same person at different conditions of the mind. This is the state of dream and waking.

We are so much engaged with the present state of the mind and so attached to the persisting condition of imagination, that nothing but the actual present seems to be real. We forget the past and ignore the future. We think now that the dream of yesterday is a falsity. And in the state of dream we apply the same conviction to the waking state also. Are we not mere slaves of imagination? Our individual life is thus proved to be a fallacy and a vile

creature of the modes of imagination, which is itself an illusion!

## 12. Why Jagrat is a Dream?

Jagrat Avastha is waking consciousness. You perceive, feel, think, know and you are conscious of the external sense-universe. The organs of hearing and sight are very vigilant. The organ of sight is more active than the ear. It rushes headlong over forms (Rupa), various types of beauty, through force of habit. The Abhimani (person thinking upon) of Jagrat state is termed as Visva. He identifies himself with the physical body. Visva is Vyasthi (individual) Abhimani. The Samasthi Abhimani (cosmic) is Virat. Visva is microcosm (Kshudra Brahmanda). Virat is macrocosm (Brahmanda). Vyasthi is single. Samashti is sum-total. A single matchstick is Vyasthi. A matchbox is Samasthi. A single house is Vyasthi. A village is Samasthi. A single mango tree is Vyasthi. A grove of mango-trees is Samasthi. Ear and eye are the avenues of sense-knowledge in the Jagrat State.

The mind creates the dream-world out of the experience and Samskaras of the waking consciousness.

Dream is a reproduction of the experiences of the physical consciousness with some modifications. The mind weaves out the dream creatures out of the material supplied from waking consciousness. In dream the subject and object are one. The perceiver and the perceived are one in this state. The Abhimani of Svapna Avastha is Taijasa. Taijasa is a Vyasthi Abhimani. The Samasthi Abhimani is Hiranyagarbha, the first-born.

In the Jagrat state there are two kinds of knowledge, viz., Abijna or Abijna Jnana and Pratibijna or Pratibijna Jnana. Abijna is knowledge through perception. You see a tree. You know: “This is a tree”. This is Abijna. Pratibijna is recognition. Here something previously observed is recognised in some other thing or place, as when, for instance, the generic character of a cow which was previously observed in the black cow again presents itself to consciousness in the grey cow or Mr. Radhakrishnan whom I first saw in Benares in 1922 again appears before me in Calcutta in 1932. There are cases of recognition where the object previously observed again presents itself to our senses. There is a Samskara in the mind of object, time and place. When I recognised Mr. Radhakrishnan in Calcutta, I omitted the previous place Benares where I saw him for the first time and the time also 1922 and I took into consideration the present place Calcutta and the present time 1932. This is knowledge through Pratibijna. In Abijna, there is no Antahkarana Samskaras. There is knowledge through mere sense-contact with the object.

When you take a retrospective view of your life in college when you are 60 years of age, it is all a dream to you. Is it not so, my friends? The future also will turn out to be so. There is only the present, which on account of the force of strong Samskaras through repetition of actions and Dhrida (strong) Vasanas appears to be real for an Aviveki (a man of non-discrimination) only. The past is a dream. The future is a dream. The solid present is also a dream. When you are alone at Allahabad for a month, you have entirely forgotten all about Chennai, your affairs, family, children etc. You have only Allahabad Samskaras. For the time being Chennai is out of your mind. There is only Allahabad in your mind. When you return again to Chennai, Allahabad affairs entirely disappear from the mind after some time. When you are in Allahabad, Chennai is a dream to you, and when you are in Chennai, Allahabad is a dream. World is a mere Samskara in the mind. For a worldly man with a gross mind full of passions this world is a solid reality.

According to Gaudapada, Dada-Guru of Sri Sankaracharya, the Jagrat Avastha is exactly a dream without any difference. Some saints say that the waking state is a long dream (Deerga Svapna). An objector says: “In Jagrat state we see the same objects in the same place as soon as we wake up (Desa Kala), whereas in dreams, we do not see again the same objects. We see different things daily. How do you account for this?”

Even in dreams sometimes we see same objects repeatedly on different occasions.

Every moment the whole world is changing. You do not see the same world every day. Young people become old. The molecules of the body are changing every second. Mind also changes every moment. Trees and all objects are continually changing. The water that you see in the Ganga at 6 a.m. is not the same when you see at 6.05 a.m. When a wick in the hurricane lamp is burning, you see the light but the wick is ever changing. There are continual changes in sun, moon, stars etc. The world is stationary for people of gross minds (Sthula Buddhi). A man of Sukshma (subtle) intellect does not see the same world every day. He witnesses changes—changes in every second and sees

you wake up, the Jagrat consciousness becomes a dream when you get Viveka and Jnana. Science tells you that the world is a mass of electrons that are in constant rotation and change.

An objector again says: “We remember the events, the persons, the places etc., in Jagrat Avastha. In dream we do not remember. How do you explain this?”

In Svapna or dream state there is Rajo Guna Pradhana. Rajo Guna predominates. In Jagrat state, Sattva Guna predominates. That is the reason why you have no remembrance in dream.

As soon as you wake up, the dreams turn out to be false. So long as you are dreaming, every thing is real to you. This world, the waking consciousness, becomes a dream when you get Jnana. Therefore *Jagrat* is termed as a dream. This appears to be paradoxical but it is not so. Think well.

In prophetic dreams the materials come from the Karana Sarira or seed body (causal body), the storehouse of Samskaras.

Readers are earnestly requested to go through very carefully Mandukya Upanishad with Gaudapada’s Karika either in Sanskrit or English translation. The dream problem is very elaborately dealt with cogent argument.

“When I consider the matter carefully, I do not find a single characteristic by means of which I can certainly determine whether I am awake or whether I dream. The visions of a dream and the experiences of my waking state are so much alike that I am completely puzzled and I do not really know that I am not dreaming at this moment.” (Descartes: Meditations P. I.)

Pascal is right when he asserts that if the same dream comes to us every night we should be just as much occupied by it as by the things which we see every day. To quote his words, “If an artisan were certain that he would dream every night for fully 12 hours that he was a king, I believe that he would be just as happy as a king who dreams every night for 12 hours that he is an artisan”.

In dream the seer and the seen are one. The mind creates the bee, flower, mountain, horses, rivers, etc., in the dream. The dream objects are not independent of the mind. They have no separate existence apart from the mind. So long as the dream lasts, the dream creatures will remain just as the milkman remains so long as the milking goes on. (The dream is quite real when the man is dreaming). Whereas in the Jagarat state the object exists independent of the mind. The objects of the waking experiences are common to us all, while those of dreams are the property of the dreamer.

Jacob puts Gaudapada’s arguments in the following syllogistic form: “Things seen in the waking state are not true: this is proposition (Pratijna); because they are seen, this is reason (Hetu); just like things seen in a dream, this is the instance (Drishtanta); as things seen in the dream are not true, so the property of the being seen belongs in like manner to things seen in the waking state; this is the application of the reason (Hetupanyaya); therefore things seen in the waking state are also untrue; this is the conclusion.

Gaudapada establishes the unreal Character of the world of experience:

1. By its similarity to dream state;
2. By its presented or objective character;
3. By the unintelligibility of the relations which organise it; and
4. By its non-persistence for all time.

## 13. Waking Experience Has Relative Reality

Waking experience is like dream experience  
When judged from the absolute standpoint.  
But it has Vyavaharika-Satta  
Or relative reality.  
Dream is Pratibhasika-Satta  
Or apparent reality.  
Turiya or Brahman is Paramarthika-Satta  
Or Absolute Reality.  
Waking is reality more real than dreaming.  
Turiya is more real than waking.  
From the point of view of Turiya,  
Both waking and dreaming are unreal.  
But waking, taken by itself,  
In relation to dream experience,  
Has greater reality than dream.  
To a certain extent,  
As Turiya is to waking,  
Waking is to dream.  
Waking is the reality behind dream;  
Turiya is the reality behind waking.  
Dream is not dream to the dreamer.  
Only by one who is awake  
Dream is known to be a dream.  
Similarly, waking appears to be real  
To one who is still in the waking state.  
Only to one who is in Turiya  
Waking is devoid of reality.  
Waking is Deergha-Svapna,  
A long dream, as contrasted with  
The ordinary dream which is short.

## II

Waking is a part of Virat-Consciousness,  
Though, in waking, due to ignorance,  
The Virat is not directly realised.  
Waking is the connecting link  
Between Visva and Virat.  
Man reflects over the world and the Reality  
When he is awake  
And when his consciousness is active.  
In dream, the intellect and the will  
Are incapacitated due to Avidya  
And deliberate contemplation becomes impossible.  
The Visva or the Jiva in the waking state  
Is possessed of intelligence and free will.  
The Taijasa or the Jiva in the dreaming state  
Is destitute of such powers of free thinking.  
Dream experience is the result of  
Impressions of waking experience;  
Whereas, waking experience is independent of  
Dream experience and its effects.  
There is a kind of order or system  
In the waking experiences,  
At least, more than in dream.  
Every day the same persons and things  
Become the objects of waking experience.

Previous days' experiences and of  
Survival and continuity of personality  
In waking experience.  
The consciousness of this continuity,  
Regularity and unity  
Is absent in dream,  
Dream is not well ordered,  
While waking is comparatively systematic.

### III

There are degrees of reality  
In the experiences of the individual.  
The three main degrees are  
Subjective, Objective and Absolute.  
Dream experience is subjective.  
Waking experience is objective.  
The realisation of Atman or Brahman  
Is experience of the absolute Reality.  
The individual is the subjective being  
In comparison with the objective world.  
The subject and the object have equal reality,  
Though both these are negated in the Absolute.  
The objective world is the field of waking experience  
And, therefore, waking is relatively real.  
But, dream is less real than waking  
In as much as the direct contact  
With the external world of waking experience  
Is absent in dream.  
Though there is an external world in dream also,  
Its value is less than that of the world in waking.  
Though the *form* of the dream world agrees with  
That of the waking world,  
In *quality* the dream world  
Is lower than the waking world.  
Space, time, motion and objects,  
With the distinction of subject and object,  
Are common to both waking and dreaming.  
Even the reality they present  
At the time of their being experienced  
Is of a similar nature.  
But, the difference lies in  
The degree of reality manifested by them.  
The Jiva feels that it is in a higher order of truth  
In waking than in dreaming.

### IV

The argument that is advanced  
To prove the unreality of waking  
Is that waking also is merely mind's play  
Even as dream is mind's imagination.  
But, the objects seen in dream  
Are not imaginations of the dream subject  
Which itself is one of the imaginary forms  
That are projected in dream,  
The dream subject is not in any way  
More real than the dream objects.

They both have equal reality  
And are equally unreal.  
The dream subject and the dream object  
Are both imaginations of the mind of Visva  
Which synthesises the subject and objects in dream.  
In like manner, the waking individual  
Is not the cause of the objects seen by it,  
For both these belong to the same order of reality.  
Neither of them is more real than the other.  
The virtues and the defects that characterise things  
Are present in all subjects and objects  
That are experienced in the waking state.  
The subject and the objects in waking  
Are both effects of the Cosmic Mind  
Which integrates all the contents of the universe.  
The Cosmic Mind has greater reality  
Than the individual mind.  
Thus the waking state is relatively  
More real than the dreaming state.

## V

It cannot be said that  
Taijasa is related to Hiranyagarbha  
In the same way as  
Visva is related to Virat.  
Taijasa has a negative experience  
Characterised by fickleness, absence of clearness,  
Lack of will power and cloudedness of intelligence.  
To express with certain reservations,  
The relation of Taijasa to Hiranyagarbha  
Is something like that of minus two to plus two:  
Whereas, Visva is to Virat  
As minus one is to plus one.  
As minus one has greater positive value  
Than minus two,  
And the distance between minus two and plus two  
Is greater than that between  
Minus one and plus one,  
Visva has greater relative value than Taijasa,  
And is more intimately connected with Virat  
Than Taijasa with Hiranyagarbha.  
Taijasa and Prajna are respectively  
The parts of Hiranyagarbha and Isvara  
Only as limited reflections with negative values  
And not positively and qualitatively.  
Otherwise Isvara would have been only  
A huge mass of ignorance,  
As he is depicted as the collective totality  
Of all Prajnas whose native experience is a state of sleep  
Where ignorance covers the existing consciousness.  
Prajna and Isvara are like minus three and plus three,  
And their relation is quite obvious.  
As when a man stands on a river bank  
And looks at his own reflection below,  
That which is highest appears as lowest—  
The original head is farthest from the reflected head,—

That which is lowest appears as highest—  
The original feet are nearest to the reflected feet,—  
In the same manner, Isvara,  
Who is the highest among the manifestations of reality  
And is omniscient and omnipotent  
Is the positive counterpart  
Of the negative sleeping experience  
Of complete ignorance and absence of power.  
Virat corresponds to the foot of the man  
Standing on the bank of the river  
And Visva to the reflected foot.  
Visva is more consciously related to Virat  
Than Taijasa to Hiranyagarbha  
Or Prajna to Isvara,  
As the foot is nearer to the reflected foot  
Than the waist to the reflected waist  
Or the head to the reflected head.  
These illustrations show that  
Waking is relatively more real  
Than dream which has only a negative value.  
The illustrations used here  
Are to be taken in their spirit and not literally,  
For, Visva, Taijasa and Prajna  
Are not merely reflections  
Of Virat, Hiranyagarbha and Isvara respectively,  
But also their limitations  
With qualities distorted  
And experiences wrested from truth.

## VI

As far as the manner of  
Subjective experience is concerned,  
It is true that what is within the mind  
Is experienced as present in external objects.  
But the objects themselves are not  
Creations of the subjective mind.  
There is a great difference between  
Isvara-Srishti and Jiva-Srishti.  
The existence of the objects  
Belongs to Isvara-Srishti.  
But the relation that exists between  
The objects and the experiencing subject  
Is Jiva-Srishti.  
The Jiva is one of the contents of the Jagat  
Which is Isvara-Srishti.  
Hence, the Jiva cannot claim to be  
The creator of the world,  
Though it is the creator of  
Its own subjective modes of  
Psychological experience.  
Waking experience is a perception.  
Dream experience is a memory.  
As perception precedes memory,  
Waking precedes dream;  
That is, dream is a remembrance  
Of waking experiences

In the form of impressions.  
To Brahman, the waking world is unreal.  
But, to the individual or the Jiva  
It is a relative fact  
Lasting as long as  
Individuality or Jivahood lasts.

## VII

That the waking world has relative reality  
Or Vyavaharika-Satta  
Does not prove that it is real  
In the absolute sense.  
Comparatively waking is on a higher order  
Than dream experiences,  
For reasons already mentioned.  
But, from the standpoint of the highest Reality,  
Waking experience also is unreal.  
As dream is transcended in the state of waking,  
The world of waking too is transcended  
In the state of Self-Realisation.

## 14. Waking Experience is as False as Dream Experience

Both in waking and in dream  
Objects are “perceived” or “seen”  
As different from the subject.  
The character of “being seen”  
Is common to both kinds of experience.  
There is subject-object-relationship  
In waking as well as in dream.  
This is the similarity between the two.  
“Something is seen as an object” means  
“Something is other than the Self”.  
The experience of the not-self is illusory,  
For, if the not-self were real,  
The Self would be limited and unreal.  
The illusory experience of the not-self  
Is common to both waking and dream.  
In waking, the mind experiences through the senses;  
In dream, the mind alone experiences.  
In both the states, the mind alone experiences  
Whether externally or internally.  
Dream is transcended by waking.  
Waking is transcended by TURIYA.  
Hence, both dream and waking are contradicted.  
Waking contradicts dream,  
And dream contradicts waking.  
When the one is, the other is not.  
Neither of the two is continuously existent,  
This proves the unreality of both.

## II

Duality is not real,  
Because duality is the opposite of eternity.



Without duality there is no perception.  
 Hence, anything that is perceived is unreal  
 Whether in dream or in waking.  
 Dream is real when there is no waking.  
 Waking is real when there is no dream.  
 Hence, both are unreal experiences.  
 They depend on one another for their existence.  
 One cannot say whether he is dreaming or waking  
 Without referring one state to another state.  
 Desires are the rulers of all experiences  
 In waking and also in dream.  
 Waking is physical functioning of desires,  
 Dream is mental functioning of desires.  
 The senses are moved by desires in waking.  
 The mind is moved by desires in dreaming.  
 Both the states are like flowing streams.  
 They do not persist forever in one state.  
 That which persists forever is real.  
 Dream and waking have a beginning and an end.  
 Change is the character of all perceived objects.  
 Change implies non-existence at the beginning  
 And also at the end.  
 That which does not exist at the beginning  
 And does not exist at the end  
 Does not exist in the middle also.  
 Therefore waking is unreal like dream.

### III

It may be objected by some that  
 Waking is real, because it is the cause of dream,  
 And dream is not the cause of waking.  
 But this objection is without support.  
 If waking is a cause,  
 It must be real.  
 If it is real,  
 It must exist forever.  
 Waking itself is without reality,  
 For it does not exist always.  
 If the cause itself is unreal,  
 How can it produce a real effect?  
 Both these are unreal states.  
 One who eats bellyful in waking state  
 May feel hungry in the dream state  
 And vice versa.  
 Things appear to be real only  
 In a particular condition.  
 They are not real always,  
 That which is not always real  
 Is an appearance and so unreal.

### IV

Anything that has got a form  
 Is unreal.  
 Forms are special modes of cognition and perception.  
 They are not ultimate.  
 In waking there are physical forms.

In dreaming there are mental forms.  
Anyhow all are forms only  
Limited in space and time.  
A form lasts only so long  
As that particular mental condition lasts;  
When there is a different mental condition  
The forms of experience also change.  
This is why the form of the world vanishes  
When Self-Realisation is attained.

## V

Both in dreaming and waking  
External perceptions are considered as real  
And internal functions as unreal (i.e., they are ignored).  
If in waking we make a distinction  
Between real and unreal,  
In dream also we do the same thing.  
Dream is real as long as it lasts,  
Waking also is real as long as it lasts.  
Dream is unreal from the standpoint of waking,  
And equally so is waking to the dreamer.  
From the standpoint of the highest Truth,  
Waking is as false as dream.

## VI

It may be said that objects in waking state  
Serve some definite purpose  
And those of dream do not serve a purpose.  
This argument is incorrect  
Because, the nature of serving a purpose  
Which is seen in objects of waking  
Is contradicted by dream and vice versa.  
The utility and objective worth  
Of Things, states, etc. in waking  
Are cancelled in the dream state,  
Even as the conditions and experiences in dream  
Are invalidated in waking.  
Objects act as means to ends  
Only in a particular condition  
And not in all conditions.  
The causal relationship of waking  
Is rendered nugatory in dream, and vice versa.  
The logical sequence of waking  
Is valid to itself alone and not to dreaming.  
So is dream valid to its own state.  
Waking and dreaming have their own notions of propriety,  
And each is stultified by the other,  
Though each appears to be real to itself.  
Thus, the validity of both the states  
Is rejected.

## VII

It may be contended that  
Objects of dream are queer, fantastic and unnatural,  
And, hence, waking cannot be like dream.  
But the experiences in dream

Are not abnormal to the dreamer.  
They appear fantastic only in  
A different state, viz. waking.  
One cannot say what is really fantastic  
And what is normal and real.  
The mind gives values to objects  
And its conception of normality and abnormality  
Changes according to the state in which it is.  
There is no permanent standard  
Of normality, beauty or decorum,  
Either in waking or in dreaming,  
Which may hold good for all times.  
The dreamer has his own conception  
Of space, time and causation,  
Even as the waking one has his own notions.  
One state is absurd when compared to the other.  
This shows that both states are illogical  
And, therefore, absurd from the highest standpoint.

## VIII

The world of waking experience is unreal,  
Because it is the imagination of the cosmic mind.  
The fact that in Self-Realisation  
There is absolute cessation of phenomenal experience  
Shows that all phenomena are unreal.  
External forms are the expressions  
Of the internal Sankalpas or willing.  
Therefore, external objects have no real value.  
They appear to exist only  
As long as the Sankalpas exist.  
The senses externalise the internal ideas  
And present them in the forms of objects.  
When the Sankalpas are drawn within  
The world of objective experience vanishes in toto.  
The Infinite Subject, viz., the Self alone remains.  
There is no such thing as  
Externality and internality in reality.  
The ego and the non-ego,  
The subject as well as the object,  
All are imaginations of the mind alone.

## IX

It may be said that  
Objects seen in waking are not  
Mere mental imaginations,  
Because the objects of waking experience  
Are seen by other people also,  
Whether or not one's mind cognises them.  
But it is seen that  
In the dream state also  
Objects of experience are open to  
The perception of other people,  
Though the people as well as the objects  
Are all subjective imaginations.  
It may be said that in waking  
We perceive through the sense-organs

And not merely through ideas.  
But it is seen that in dream also  
We perceive through the sense-organs  
Belonging to the dream-state,  
Which are not less real than those of waking state.  
As dream is unreal,  
Waking also must be unreal.

## X

The objective world of waking experience  
Cannot have independent existence,  
Because it is relative to the subject  
Which cognises or perceives it.  
The object is called an object  
Just because there is a perceiving subject.  
Similarly, a subject is called a subject  
Just because there is a perceived object.  
Neither of the two is self-existent,  
And, therefore, both prove themselves to be unreal.  
Subject and object appear  
In the form of cause and effect.  
Without a cause there is no effect,  
Without an effect nothing can be a cause;  
The conception of causation itself is illogical.  
The mind perceives and recognises objects  
Only by relating one thing to another.  
The whole world of perception  
Is a bundle of unintelligible relationships  
Which the mind tries to organise into cause and effects.  
Further, there is no causation at all,  
Because, cause and effect are continuous.  
There cannot be a lapse of time  
In which the cause remains unchanged.  
If the cause can exist unchanged for some time,  
There is no reason why it should change at any time at all.  
Either there is continuous causation,  
Or no causation at all.  
If causation is continuous,  
Cause and effect become identical,  
Being inseparable from one another.  
If they are identical,  
It means there is no causation at all.  
If there is no causation,  
There is no world of experience also.  
The whole causal scheme is illogical,  
Because it either requires the existence  
Of a first uncaused cause,  
Or it itself is meaningless.  
There is no meaning in saying that  
There is a first uncaused cause,  
For, thereby, we create a beginning for time.  
If causation were real,  
It would never be possible to get rid of it.  
But Self-Realisation breaks the chain of causation.  
Hence, causation is false,  
And, consequently, the world of experience

Also is false.  
As in dream also there is experience  
Of the causal series,  
The waking world is false like the dream world.

## 15. Jagarat is as Unreal as Dream

For the Ajnanis or the worldly-minded persons the sensual objects are quite real. For the sages or those who are endowed with discrimination and enquiry they are unreal.

Whatever you see is false. There is no doubt in this. The deer sees water in the mirage when the sun is hot. They run towards the mirage for drinking water. They do not find any water there. The boy runs to take a piece of silver when there is bright sun. When he goes near the silver he does not find any silver. He finds only the mother-of-pearl. When a girl goes to bring water at night she sees a snake on her way and gets frightened. She takes a light to see the snake but finds only a rope. There is no snake there. A young man embraces a girl in his dream and experiences actual discharge of semen. When he wakes up he does not find a girl. You behold blueness in the sky. The sky appears as a blue dome. When one moves in the aeroplane in the sky he does not find any blue dome but the blue dome appears at a distance. Whatever you see do not really exist. They are mere illusory appearances like the objects in a dream. But the seer exists when the objects appear and disappear.

In the dream state big mountains, elephants, cities, big rivers etc. are seen within a minute Nadi called Hitanadi that is located in the throat. There is no space in the minute Nadi for these big things to remain there. Hence the dream objects are false or illusory. The objects that appear in the waking state also are false.

In the dream you witness the events of several years within a few minutes. Within a day of Brahma thousand Chaturyugas pass for us. Within the day of a Deva six months pass for us. Within the time taken by a huge mountain snake for a second meal, man takes his meals a hundred times. Within the time taken by a child to develop itself in the womb, small insects take time to generate crores of their progeny. A happy man spends one night like a minute whereas a man who is drowned in grief spends one night like several years. Hence time also does not appear to be the same at all times for all. The objects that appear and perish in time are illusory.

The thing seen by you in your dream is not seen in the same place and in the same manner in the waking state. In the same manner one may say that Mr. X is a good man. The same man appears as a bad man for another.

The objects seen in a dream do not exist correctly in the waking state. The objects seen in the waking state appear different even in the waking state also. In the dream state you do not recollect the things of the waking state. You do not recollect the things in the dreaming state, "I saw such and such objects in the waking state. I do not see them now." Therefore the objects of the waking state are more false than the objects of the dream. Srutis and sages declare that the objects of the world are as false as the objects of the dream. They call the world Deergha-Svapna or a long dream.

That which does not exist in the beginning and in the end does not really exist in the middle also. It is unreal. The snake that is found in the rope at night does not exist when a lamp is brought. It appears in the middle only. Such is the case with silver in the mother-of-pearl, water in the mirage, city in the clouds, etc. Therefore they are unreal even when they appear. The dream objects also do not exist in the daytime. Similarly the objects of this world appear in the middle only. Hence they are unreal.

An objector says: "The food and drink that you take in the waking state give you satisfaction. But hunger is not appeased by the food taken in dream. Therefore the objects of the dream are false. The objects of the waking state are true." A man who goes to sleep after taking a sumptuous meal in the waking state suffers from the pangs of hunger in the dream. He who enjoys a good feast in the dream becomes very hungry as soon as he wakes up. Similarly the results of actions done in the waking state are not seen in the dream and vice versa. Therefore, the waking state is as false as dream.

An objector says, "A man dreams that he has four hands and that he is flying in the air. Is this not false? Jagrat state is not like this. Therefore it is true." A man obtains the birth of a Deva or animal or a bird on account of his Karmas.

He becomes Indra with thousand hands in the waking state. He becomes a bird and flies in the air in the waking state. He becomes animal with four legs, a centipede with hundred feet or a snake without feet. Therefore waking state and dream state are same. Just as in dream some objects are false, some are true, so also in waking state some objects like the snake in the rope are false, some like jar, cloth are true. The objects of the dream and waking state are not so absolutely true as Atman or Brahman.

Just as you remove a thorn by a thorn, just as you remove the dirt of the cloth by another dirt—the salt-earth, just as you cut the iron by another iron only, so also you will have to take recourse to another false object like a Guru or a God, though Atman or Brahman alone is everything. A false object in the dream produces real fear and wakes you up. Sometimes whatever you see in dream turns out to be true. An unreal woman in dream causes a real discharge of semen. Although God and Guru are not so real as Brahman, they are boats to help you to cross this Samsara or ocean of births and deaths. Without their grace you cannot attain immortality or eternal bliss.

Atma Svarup! Brahman alone is really existent. Jiva, world are false! Kill this illusory egoism. The world is unreal when compared to Brahman. It is a solid reality for a passionate worldly man, even as dreams are real to the childish. The world does not exist for a Jnani or a Mukta.

## **16. Remove The Colouring of The Mind**

In days of yore there were very able dyers in Marwar or Rajputana. They would give seven colours to the sari or clothes of ladies. After washing the cloth one colour will fade away. Another colour will shine. After some washing a third colour will manifest in the cloth; then a fourth colour and so on. Even so the mind is coloured when it associates with the different objects of the world. When the mind is Sattvic, it has white colour; when it is Rajasic, it is tinged with red colour; when it is Tamasic it has a black colour.

The mind plays with the five senses of perception and gets experiences in the waking state. The impressions are lodged in the causal body or Karana Sarira. Ajnana or causal body is like a black sheet of cloth. In it are contained the Samskaras of all your previous births.

The mind is ever rotating like a wheel. It receives the different sense-impressions through the avenues of the senses.

In the dream state the doors or windows of the senses are shut. The mind remains alone and plays. It is the subject and it is the object. It projects various sorts of objects like mountains, rivers, gardens, chariots, cars, etc., from its own body from the material collected during the waking state. It manufactures curious mixtures and marvellous combinations. Sometimes the experiences of the previous births that are lodged in the causal body flash out during the dreaming state.

Remove the colouring of the mind through meditation on Atman. Do not allow the mind to run into the sensual grooves. Fortify yourself by developing the Vijnanamaya Kosha or intellect through Vichara or enquiry of Brahman, reflection and contemplation. The Vijnanamaya Kosha will serve the purpose of a strong fortress. It will not allow the sense-impressions to be lodged in the causal body. It will not allow the impressions of the causal body to come out. It will serve a double purpose.

You will be free from dreams through meditation on the Supreme Being or Brahman when the colouring of the mind has been removed.

Brahma Jnanis or Sages have no dreams.

May you all attain the Turiya or the fourth state of eternal bliss, which transcends the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep!

## **17. Upanishads And Dreams**

“The Purusha has only two abodes, this and the next world. The dream state, which is the third is at the junction of the two. Abiding at the junction he sees the two abodes, this and the next world. In proportion the endeavour with which one is striving to obtain the place of the other world does he accordingly see both suffering and bliss. When he dreams he takes away a little of the impressions of this world which consists of all elements (the waking state), himself puts the body aside and himself creates a dream body in its place, revealing his own splendour by his own light and dreams. In this state the Purusha himself becomes unmingled light.” (Bri. Up. IV.iii.9.)

“There are no chariots, nor horses to be yoked to them, nor roads there, but he creates the chariots, horses and the roads. There are no pleasures, joys or delights, but he creates the pleasures, joys and delights. There are no tanks, no lakes or rivers there, but he creates the tanks, lakes and rivers, for he is the agent.” (Ibid. IV.iii.10.)

“The God-like Purusha who moves alone puts the body aside in the dream state and himself awake and taking the shining functions of the organs with him, watches those that are asleep. Again he comes to the waking state.” (Ibid. IV.iii.11.)

“The radiant Purusha who is immortal and moves alone, preserves the unclean rest of the body by the power of the vital force and roams out of the rest. Himself immortal, he proceeds where his desire leads him.” (Ibid. IV.iii.12.)

“In the dream world, the shining one attains higher and lower states and assumes manifold forms. He seems to be enjoying himself in the company of women or laughing or beholding fearful sights.” (Ibid. IV.iii.13.)

“Everybody sees his sport but nobody sees him.” They say, “Do not wake him up suddenly”. If the Purusha does not return to the waking state through the same doors of the senses through which he entered into the state of dream, if he re-enters in any other manner, then diseases are produced such as blindness, deafness etc. which are difficult to be cured. Some day indeed that the dream state of a man is the same as his waking state as he sees in dreams only those things that he sees in the waking state. This is not so because in the dream state the Purusha becomes a self-shining light.” (Ibid. IV.iii.14.)

“After enjoying himself and roaming and merely seeing the results of the good and evil in dreams, he rests in a state of deep sleep. He comes back in a reverse order to his former condition, the dream state. He is not touched by whatever he beholds in that state, because the Purusha is unattached.” (Ibid. IV.iii.15.)

“After enjoying himself and wandering in the waking state and after seeing what is holy and sinful, the results of good and evil, he proceeds again in the reverse order to his former condition, the dream state or the deep sleep.” (Ibid. IV.iii.17.)

“Just as a large fish swims alternately to both the banks of the river, the right and the left one or the Eastern and Western, so the Purusha glides between both boundaries—the boundary of dream and the boundary of the waking state.” (Ibid. IV.iii.18.)

“In him are those Nadis called Hita, which are as fine as a hair split into a thousand parts, and filled with white, blue, yellow, green and red juice.

“Therefore all the objects of terror, which a man sees when awake, are ignorance fancied by him in dream, when anybody seems to kill him, sees to overpower him, an elephant seems to put him to fight when he falls into a pit. Again when he seems to be conscious, “I am God. I am King. I am even all this,” he has attained the highest peace.

“When the individual soul is in the state of dream, he becomes an Emperor as it were or a noble Brahmana as it were, or attains states high or low, as it were. Just as an Emperor, taking his followers, moves about as he pleases, so does the soul, taking the organs move about as he pleases in his own body. (Ibid. II.i.18.)

“Because in dream the dreamer does not actually do what is holy or evil; he is not chained by either; for good or evil actions and their consequences are not imputed to the mere spectator for them.

“Having in that dream enjoyed pleasure, wandered about and seen what is holy and sinful, he proceeds again in the reverse order to the place of birth, to the waking state. He is not chained by what he sees there, for, Purusha is

## 18. Prasna-Upanishad on Dreams

(Prasna Up. IV-1 to 9)

Then Gargya the grandson of Surya questioned Pippalada:

“O Bhagavan! What are they that sleep in man? What wake in him? Which is the Deva who sees dreams? Whose is this bliss? On what do all these depend?”

Pippalada replied: O Gargya! Just as the rays of the sun, when setting, become one in that disc of light and come forth again when the sun rises again, so all of these become one in the highest Deva—the mind. Therefore, at that time, that man does not hear, see, smell, taste, feel, does not speak, nor take, nor enjoy, nor evacuate, nor move; they say ‘he sleeps’.

The fires of Prana alone are awake in the city (body). The Apana is the Garhapatya fire. Vyana is the Anvaharyapachana fire. The Prana is the Ahavaniya fire, because it is taken out of Garhapatya fire.

Because the Samana distributes equally the oblations, the inspiration and expiration, he is the priest (Hotri). The mind is the sacrifice, the Udana is the reward of the sacrifice; he leads the sacrifices every day (in deep sleep to Brahman).

In this state, this Deva (mind) enjoys in dream his greatness. What has been seen, he sees again, what has been heard, he hears again, what has been enjoyed in different countries and quarters, he enjoys again. What has been seen and not seen, heard and not heard, experienced and not experienced, real and unreal, he sees all; he being all, sees.

When he is overpowered by light, then that God (mind) sees no dreams and at that time the bliss arises in this body.

Just as, O beloved one, birds repair to a tree to roost (dwell), so indeed all this rests in the Supreme Atman.

The earth and the subtle elements, the water and its subtle elements, the fire and its subtle elements, the air and its subtle elements, Akasa and its subtle elements, the eye and what can be seen, the ear and what can be heard, the nose and what can be smelt, taste and what can be tasted, touch and its objects, speech and its objects, the hands and what can be grasped, the feet and what can be walked, the organ of generation and what is to be enjoyed, the organ of excretion and what must be excreted, the mind and what must be thought of, the intellect and what must be determined, egoism and its object, Chitta and its object, light and its object, Prana and what is to be supported by it —(all these rest in the Supreme Atman in deep sleep.)

It is he who sees, feels, hears, smells, tastes, thinks, knows; he is the doer, the intelligent soul, the Purusha. He dwells in the highest, indestructible Self.

## 19. Dream

(From Mandukyopanishad—4)

The second quarter is the Taijasa whose sphere or field or place is dream, who is conscious of internal objects, who has seven limbs and nineteen mouths and who enjoys the subtle objects.

During dream, the mind creates various kinds of objects out of the impressions produced by the experiences of the waking state. The mind reproduces the whole of its waking life in dream through the force of Avidya (ignorance), Kama (desire or imagination) and Karma (action). The mind is the perceiver and the mind itself is the perceived in the dream. The mind creates the objects without the help of any external means. It creates various curious, fantastic mixtures. You may witness in the dream that your living father is dead, that you are flying in the air. You may see in



the waking state are gratified in the dream. Dream is a mysterious phenomenon. It is more interesting than the waking state.

Svapna or dream is that state during which Atman (Taijasa) experiences through the mind associated with the Vasanas of the waking condition, sound and other objects which are of the form of the Vasanas created for the time being, even in the absence of the gross sound and the others. Like a businessman tired of worldly acts, in the waking state the individual soul strives to find the path to retire into his abode within. The Svapna Avastha is that in which when the senses are at rest, there is the manifestation of the knower and the known along with the affinities (Vasanas) of things enjoyed in the waking state. In this state Visva alone, his actions in the waking state having ceased, reaches the state of Taijasa (of Tejas, effulgence or essence of light), who moves in the middle of the Nadis (nerves), illuminates by his lustre, the heterogeneity of the subtle dream world which is the form of Vasanas (affinities), and himself enjoys according to his wish.

Sutratman or Hiranyagarbha, under the orders of Isvara, having entered the microcosmic subtle body and having Manas (mind) as his vehicle, reaches the Taijasa state. Then he goes by the names of Taijasa, Pratibhasika and Svapnakalpita (the one bred out of dream).

The dreamer creates the world of his own in the dreaming state. Mind alone works independently in this state. The senses are withdrawn into the mind. The senses are at rest. Just as a man withdraws himself from the outside world, closes the door and windows of his room and works within the room, so also the mind withdraws itself from the outside world and plays in the dream world with the Vasanas and Samskaras and enjoys objects made up of fine or subtle ideas which are the products of desire. Dream is a mere play of the mind only. The mind itself projects all sorts of subtle objects from its own body through the potentiality of impressions of the waking state (Vasanas) and enjoys these objects. Therefore there is a very subtle experience by Taijasa in the form of Vasanas only, whereas the experience of the waking state by Visva is gross.

You will find in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad IV-iii-9, “He sleeps full of the impressions produced by the varied experience of the waking state and experiences dreams. He takes with him the impressions of the world during the waking state, destroys and builds them up again and experiences dream by his own light.” The Atharvana-veda says, “All these are in the mind. They are experienced or cognised by the Taijasa.” The experiencer of the dream state is called Taijasa, because he is entirely of the essence of light.

Just as pictures are painted on the canvas, so also the impressions of the waking state are painted in the canvas-mind. The pictures on the canvas seem to possess various dimensions though it is on a plane surface only. Even so, though the dream-experiences are really states of the mind only, the experiencer experiences internality and externality in the dream world. He feels while dreaming that the dream world is quite real.

**Pravivikta:** *Pra*—differentiated; *vivikta*—from the objects of the state. The objects perceived in the waking state have an external reality common to all beings, whereas the objects perceived in the dreams are revivals of impressions received in the waking state and have an external reality only to the dreamer.

**Antahprajna:** Inward consciousness; the experiencer is conscious of the dream world only. Pravivikta or subtle is that which manifests itself in dreams, being impressions of objects perceived in the waking state. The state of consciousness by which these subtle objects are perceived is called Antahprajna or inner perception. The impressions of the waking state remain in the mind, which independent of the senses are perceived in the dream. The mind is more internal than the senses. The dreamer is conscious of the mental states which are the impressions left in the mind by the previous Jagrat Avastha or waking state. Hence it is called Antah-prajna.

The microcosmic aspect of Atman in the subtle or mental state is called Taijasa and His macrocosmic aspect is known as Hiranyagarbha. Just as Virat is one with Visva in the waking state, so also Taijasa is one with Hiranyagarbha in the dreaming state.

## 20. The Story of a Dreamer Subhoda

Subodha was born in a Brahmin family in the ancient capital of Indraprastha. He was leading a pure life. He was

second to none in learning. He was piety and compassion incarnate. He had every virtue that could be desired. He was highly charitable and God-minded. He was a Godly personality. He was God living on earth. He was a perfect celibate.

One fine day Subhoda took a refreshing bath, had a sumptuous meal. It was midday on a midsummer. It was terribly sultry. He felt exhausted and leaned against a low couch. He felt drowsy and fell into the state of dream. In his dream he became the son of the King of Kasi. He grew up to the age of 12. His father, the king of Kasi educated him in all the Vidyas suitable to a Prince. The prince was named Priyadarshi. Prince Priyadarshi soon picked up all the arts, archery etc. The king of Kasi prepared the marriage of his son in proper time. Prince Priyadarshi was installed on the throne and the king retired. Priyadarshi ruled the country justly and wisely.

One day King Priyadarshi went on a hunting expedition with a retinue of followers. He had a very good game. He was extremely tired. His retinue had fallen back. He was far away from them. He tied the horse to a tree. He went to a hut and demanded water for drinking. A beautiful lady equal in beauty to a celestial damsel brought a glassful of water. The king was enchanted by the beauty of the lady. He wanted to marry her. The father of the woman also agreed on condition that he remained with them and gave half of his wealth in return. The king agreed.

The king took the newly wedded wife to the kingdom. She turned to be a wretched woman. She ill-treated every one. She led the king into all evil ways which the king was not at all habituated to. He led a very loose life. He became very unpopular in the country. He was disliked by all because he never cared for the welfare of the people. All the day and night he was engaged in the company of the wicked new queen. He had many sons and daughters by his new wife. He led a despicable life in her company.

One night King Priyadarshi retired to his bedchamber after a long day of dissipation and sensuous revelling. He laid himself upon the bed soon and sank into a sound slumber. King Priyadarshi dreamt that his death took place and people were carrying his dead body. He then found himself reborn in the house of a Bania. The Bania was a wine seller. He too took the profession and led the life of a wine seller throughout his life. One day he drank plenty of wine. He fell into drunkard stupor. In that condition he dreamt that he was born as a Sudra in the country of Usinara. He served the King of Usinara as a stable keeper. The whole life he was tending the horses. One night he dreamt that he was born as Chandala and was leading the life as such. One day he went to the forest to collect fuel. He was attacked by a tiger. He shrieked and woke up to find himself to be once again Subhoda, the Brahmin leaning on his couch.

Subhoda clearly and vividly perceived his various lives as King Priyadarshi, as the son of a Bania, as a Sudra and as a Chandala. He lived several lives. All these he experienced in one single dream.

O Man! You are like Subhoda. Just as Subhoda shrieked when the tiger attacked him you are also now under the painful agony of your present life. You find everywhere selfishness, crookedness, wars and calamities. There is no food to eat. There is no peace of mind. You are entangled in the meshes of Maya and Tamas. You are lazy and lethargic. You are sometimes fed up with life. Sometimes you even want to commit suicide when you are placed in acute suffering in your private and public life. You find your ambitions are shattered. You fall in evil company. You spoil your life and youth. You have endless desires.

Friend, tell me frankly: "How long you want to remain in this state of abject ignorance and suffering"? Wake up. Gird up your loins. Become a Yogi. You are not this physical body. You have nothing to do with suffering. Shake of this lethargy. Open your eyes. Enough of your long slumber. Wake up! Wake up to the Reality! Now it is Brahmanuhurtha, the dawn of glorious future! Sleep no more. Identify yourself with the real spirit within. You will no more be tormented by agony and misery.

Rise up in the ladder of Yoga. Follow the instructions of the ancient seers and sages. Practise Namasmarana. Give up vanity. Be humble and simple. Lead a life of purity, goodness and nobility. You will shine as a dynamic Yogi!

May you bring light, joy and peace to the Whole world! May you become Immortal!

## 21. Raja Janaka's Dream

Raja Janaka ruled over the country of Videha. He was once reclining on a sofa. It was the middle of the day in the hot month of June. He had a short nap for a few seconds. He dreamt that a rival king with a large army had invaded his country and slew his soldiers and ministers. He was driven out of his palace barefooted and without any clothes covering him.

Janaka found himself roaming about in a jungle. He was thirsty and hungry. He reached a small town where he begged for food. No one paid any attention to his entreaties. He reached a place where some people were distributing food to the beggars. Each beggar had an earthen bowl to receive rice water. Janaka had no bowl and so they turned him out to bring a bowl. He went in search of a vessel. He requested other beggars to lend him a bowl, but none would part with his bowl. At last Janaka found a broken piece of a bowl. Now he ran to the spot where rice water was distributed. All the foodstuff had been already distributed.

Raja Janaka was very much tired on account of long travelling, hunger and thirst and heat of the summer. He stretched himself near a fireplace where foodstuff was cooked. Here some one took pity over Janaka. He gave him some rice water which was found at the bottom of a vessel. Janaka took it with intense joy and just as he put it to his lips, two large bulls tumbled fighting over him. The bowl was broken to pieces. The Raja woke up with great fear.

Janaka was trembling violently. He was in a great dilemma as to which of his two states was real. All the time he was in dream, he never thought that it was an illusion and that the misery of hunger and thirst and his other troubles were unreal.

The queen asked Janaka, "O Lord! What is the matter with you?" The only words which Janaka spoke were, "Which is real, this or that?" From that time he left all his work and became silent. He uttered nothing but the above words.

The ministers thought that Janaka was suffering from some disease. It was announced by them that anyone who cured the Raja will be richly rewarded and those who fail to cure the Raja will be made life prisoners. Great physicians and specialists began to pour in and tried their luck, but no one could answer the query of the Raja. Hundreds of Brahmins well versed in the science of curing diseases were put in the state prison.

Among the prisoners was also the father of the great sage Ashtavakra. When Ashtavakra was a boy of only ten years of age, he was told by his mother that his father was a state prisoner because he failed to cure Raja Janaka. He at once started to see Janaka. He asked the Raja if he desired to hear the solution of his questions in a brief and few words as the question itself is put or full details of his dream experience may be recited. Janaka did not like to have his humiliating dream repeated in presence of a big gathering. He consented to receive a brief answer.

Ashtavakra then whispered into the ear of Janaka, "Neither this nor that is real." Raja Janaka at once became joyful. His confusion was removed.

Raja Janaka then asked Ashtavakra, "What is real?" There upon there was a long dialogue between him and the sage. This is recorded in the well-known book, "Ashtavakra Gita," which is highly useful for all seekers after Truth.

## 22. Goudapadacharya on Dreams

Men of knowledge have declared the unreality of everything that is seen in the dream, because all these objects of the dream are located within the body and exist in a confined space.

All these entities like mountains, elephants etc., are seen in the dream only inside the body. Therefore, they cannot be real.

And on account of the shortness of the time, it is impossible for the dreamer to go out of the body and perceive the objects of dream. And when the dreamer wakes up, he does not find himself in the place even in the dream. It is not

waking state. His going to such a long distance and coming back to his body within half a day (one night) is not a fact. Hence this is unreal that he goes out of the body. He dreams of some place but he wakes up in another place where he slept the previous day.

Though a man goes to sleep at night he feels as if he is seeing objects in the daytime and meeting many persons in the broad daylight. But this meeting is found to be false. Therefore the dream is a falsity.

The Sruti declares the illustration of the state of dream, by saying, “there are no chariots” etc. This assertion is based on reason.

Moreover the different objects perceived in the dream are unreal even though they are perceived to exist. For the same reason the objects of the waking state are illusory. The nature of the objects is not different in the waking and the dreaming states. The only difference is in the limitation of space connected with the object. The fact of *being seen* is commonly illusory in both states.

Further, the waking and dreaming states are same since the objects perceived in both states are same. That which is non-existent at the beginning and also non-existent in the end, is necessarily non-existent in the middle. The objects we see are thus only illusions, though we regard them as real, due to our ignorance of the Reality of the Atman.

The objects used as means to some end or purpose in the waking state are contradicted in the dream state. A man in the waking state, eats and drinks and appeases his hunger and is free from thirst. But when he goes to sleep, he finds himself in dream again afflicted with hunger and thirst as if he has not taken food and drink for days together. And the contrary also happens and is found to be true. A person who has taken full meal and drink in the dream finds himself afflicted with hunger and thirst as soon as he wakes up from sleep. Hence we establish the illusoriness of the objects of both the waking and the dreaming states.

The objects perceived in dream are all usually, met with in the waking state, and those which are not met with in the waking state own their existence to the peculiar conditions or circumstances in which his mind is working for the time being. Just as Indra, etc., who reside in heaven have thousand eyes, etc., on account of their existence in heaven, so also there are the abnormal peculiar features of the dreamer due to the peculiar conditions of the state of dream. All these objects are but the imaginations of his own mind. It is just like the case of a person in the waking state, who, while going to another country sees on the way objects belonging to the place. Just as snake in the rope and mirage in the desert are unreal and are mere mental imaginations, so are the objects of dream and waking experience.

In the dream state also those which are mere modifications of the mind cognised within are illusory. For, those internal objects vanish the moment they are perceived. Objects perceived outside are considered as real. Similarly in the waking state objects known as real and mental imaginations should be considered as unreal. Objects, both external and internal, are mere creations of the mind whether it is in the dream or in the waking state.

## **23. Sri Nimbarkacharya on Dreams**

As some dreams are indicative of future good or bad fortunes, it is impossible for the individual to dream a good or a bad dream according to his own choice, he, being in his present state of bondage, ignorant of the future. The individual soul, in his emancipated state, can certainly exercise his will for the creation of vision in dreams; but the power, in the state of his bondage, remains eclipsed by the superior will of the Universal Soul, who directs his actions according to the merits and demerits of his past conduct; and the suppression of his power is due to his being engaged in the body.

The creation in dream is all the doing of the Universal soul; as it is of a strange and illusive character, being not entirely true, nor entirely untrue; and as such, it cannot be done by the individual soul, for his essential characteristics including creative powers, in the present state of bondage, are as yet unrealised; as he is limited and conditioned, his inherent powers cannot have full play; and therefore it is not possible for him to create the strange things of dream.

So the Universal Soul is the creator of dreams and not the individual soul; for had it been possible for him to shape his dreams, he would never have dreamt a bad dream, but would always have dreamt only propitious ones.

## 24. Dream of Chuang Tze

*Chuang Tze, a Chinese Philosopher, once dreamt that he was a butterfly. On waking, he said to himself, "Now, am I a man dreaming that I am a butterfly, or am I a butterfly thinking that I am a man?"*

One night when Chuang Tze lay in bed,  
He dreamed he was a butterfly,  
Then waking himself he said,  
To solve this problem now I'll try;  
Am I a man I've wondered long,  
Or butterfly that thinks I'm Chuang?

## 25. Dream Hints

### I

Dreams and Death are rock foundations of all philosophy. Dream world is totally different from the waking world. But some facts are strikingly common to both. (1) Sometimes we have a dream within a dream. (2) During sleep, sometimes we are conscious of the fact that we are asleep and we are dreaming. (3) In dreams more often than not we assume a body that is the master of the dream world. (4) Sometimes we feel extremely helpless amidst the facts of the dream world. We cry and we weep to the extent that the physiological system is affected. From these facts of common experience some conclusions can be drawn. It will be readily conceded: (a) that cognitive, connotive and affective processes are as much owned by dream personality as by the personality of the waking subjects; (b) that in the handling of the facts of the dream world, reason operates subject to the laws of the dream world in the same manner as it operates in the physical world subject to the laws of physics. Since the law of the two worlds widely differ, the fruits of the operations of reason must be necessarily different, e.g., Reason helps the man to cross the ocean in the dream by bodily flight in the air; it can never suggest the same thing in the physical world. Such a suggestion would belong to the realm of *imagination* in the waking world; (c) that Introspection brings even to the dream personality (d) that there is some sort of interaction between the dream personality and the psychological waking self that in its turn affects that physiological system and finally (e) in connection with the foregoing interaction, it must be noted that it is the mind-stuff that makes interaction possible. The facts of the two worlds although very much similar have no line of continuity except through the medium of the mind stuff. Thus however much we may know about the facts of the different worlds, there must remain discontinuity between the two worlds and unless we have discovered the common continuum i.e. the mind stuff.

### II

When you dream you see the events of fifty years within an hour. You actually feel that fifty years have passed. Which is correct, the time of one hour of waking consciousness or the fifty years of dreaming consciousness? Both are correct. The waking state and the dreaming state are of the same quality of nature. They are equal (Samana). The only difference is that the waking state is a long dream or Deergha Svapna.

In dream the Samskaras of your previous births, which are imbedded in your Karana Sarira (causal body), will assume forms and become dream picture.

### III

The difference between the waking and the dreaming states consists in this, that in the waking condition the mind depends on the outwards impressions, while in the dreaming state it creates its impressions and enjoys them. It uses, of course, the materials of the waking state. Jagrat is a long dream state only (Deergha Svapna).

Manorajya (building castles in the air), recollection of the events and things of dream, recollection of things long past in the waking state all are Svapna Jagrat (Dreaming in the waking state).

When the mind enters the Hita Nadi which proceeds from the heart and surrounds the great membrane round the heart, which is as thin as a hair divided into thousand parts and is filled with the minute essence of various colours of white, black, yellow and red, the individual soul or Jiva (ego) experiences the state of dream (Svapna Avastha).

You dream that you are a king. You enjoy various kinds of royal pleasures. As soon as you wake up, everything vanishes. But you do not feel for the loss because you know that the dream creatures are all false. Even in the waking consciousness if you are well established in the idea that the world is a false illusion, you will not get any pain.

When you know the real Tattva (Brahman) the waking consciousness also will become quite false like a dream. Wake up and realise! my child.

There is temperamental difference. Some rarely get dreams. A Jnani who has knowledge of the Self will have no dreams.

During dream you see splendid, effulgent light. Where does it come from? From Atman. The light that is present in the dream clearly indicates that Atman is self-luminous (Svayam Jyoti, Sva Prakasa).

When modified by the impressions which the external objects have left, it (the Jiva) sees dreams.

In dream state the senses are quiet and absorbed in the mind. The mind alone operates in a free and unfettered manner. The mind itself assumes the various forms of bee, flower, mountain, elephant, horse, river etc. The seer and the seen are one.

## 26. Dream-Symbols And Their Meanings

*Abuse:* There may be a dispute between you and the person with whom you do business. Take heed and be not slack in your attentions.

*Accident:* Personal afflictions may be inevitable. But you will remove soon from the trouble.

*Accuse:* This is a sign of great trouble. You will acquire riches by your own personal efforts.

*Adultery:* Troubles are approaching. Your prospects may be blasted. Despair will catch hold of you.

*Advancement:* A sign of success in all that you undertake.

*Advocate:* A dream that you are an advocate indicates that you will be prominent in future. You will win universal respect.

*Affluence:* This is not a favourable dream. It is indicative of poverty.

*Anger:* The person with whom you are angry is your best friend.

*Ass:* All your great troubles, in spite of despairing circumstances, will end in ultimate success after much struggle and suffering.

*Baby:* If you are nursing a baby, it denotes sorrow and misfortune. If you see a baby that is sick, it means that somebody among your relatives will die.

*Bachelor:* Dreaming of a bachelor tells that you will shortly, meet with a friend.

*Bankrupt:* This is a dream of warning lest you should undertake something undesirable for you and also injurious to

yourself. Be cautious in your transactions.

*Battle:* To dream of being in a battle means quarrel with neighbours or friends in a serious manner.

*Beauty:* To dream that you are beautiful indicates that you will become ugly with sickness and that you will become weak in body. Increasing beauty indicates death.

*Birds:* To see birds flying are very unlucky; it denotes sorrowful setback in circumstances. Poor persons may become better especially if they hear birds sing.

*Birth:* For unmarried women to dream of giving of birth to children, is indicative of inevitable unchastity. For married women it indicates happy confinement.

*Blind:* To dream of the blind is a sign that you will have no real friends.

*Boat:* To sail in a boat or ship on smooth waters is lucky. On rough waters, it is unlucky. To fall into water indicates great peril.

*Books:* To dream of books is an auspicious sign. Your future life will be very agreeable. Woman dreaming of books will get a son of eminent learning.

*Bread:* You will succeed in earthly business pursuits. Eating good bread indicates good health and long life. Burnt bread is a sign of funeral and so is bad.

*Bride, Bridegroom:* This dream is an unlucky one. It indicates sorrow and disappointment. You will mourn at the death of some relative.

*Bugs:* This indicates sure sickness. Many enemies are seeking to injure you.

*Butter:* Good dream. Joy and feasting. Sufferings terminate quickly.

*Camel:* Heavy burdens will come upon you. You will meet with heavy disasters. But you will bear with heroism.

*Cat:* This is a bad dream. This indicates treachery and fraud. Killing a cat indicates discovery of enemies.

*Cattle:* You will become rich and fortunate. Black and big-horned cattle indicate enemies of a violent nature.

*Children:* See Birth.

*Clouds:* Dark clouds indicate great sorrows that have to be passed through. But they will pass away if the clouds are moving or breaking away.

*Corpse:* Vision of a corpse indicates a hasty and imprudent engagement in which you will be unhappy.

*Cow:* Milking cow is a sign of riches. To be pursued by a cow indicates an overtaking enemy.

*Crow:* This indicates a sorrowful funeral ceremony.

*Death:* This indicates long life. But a sick person dreaming of death has the positive results.

*Desert:* Travelling across a desert shows the inevitability of a long and tedious journey. Accompaniment of sunshine indicates successful journey.

*Devil:* It is high time for you to mend yourself. Great evil may come to you. You must pursue virtue.

*Dinner:* If you are taking your dinner, it foretells great difficulties where you will be in want of meals. You will be uncomfortable. Enemies will try to injure your character. You should be careful about those whom you are confiding.

evil company and intemperance.

*Earthquake:* This foretells that great trouble is going to come, loss in business, bereavement and separation. Family ties are broken by death—quarrels in family and fear everywhere, heart breaking agony and disaster from all sides.

*Eclipse:* Hopes are eclipsed. Death is near. Enjoyment may be put an end to. There is no use of dotting on the wife, for life is coming to an end. The friend is a traitor. All expectations will bear no fruit.

*Elephant:* Good health, success, strength, prosperity, intelligence.

*Embroidery:* Those persons who love you are not true to their salt. They will deceive you.

*Famine:* National prosperity and individual comfort. Much enjoyment. A dream of contrary.

*Father:* Father loves you. If the father is dead, it shows a sign of affliction.

*Fields:* Very great prosperity. To walk in green fields shows great happiness and wealth. Everything happens good. Scorched fields denote poverty.

*Fighting:* Quarrels in families. Misunderstanding among lovers, if not temporary separation. A bad dream for merchants, soldiers and sailors.

*Fire:* Health and great happiness, kind relations and warm friends.

*Floods:* Successful trade, safe voyage for traders. But to ordinary persons it indicates bad health and unfavourable circumstances.

*Flowers:* Gathering beautiful flowers is an indication of prosperity. You will be very fortunate in all your undertakings.

*Frogs:* These creatures are not harmful. This dream therefore is not unfavourable. It denotes success.

*Ghost:* This is a very bad omen. Difficulties will be overwhelming. Terrible enemies will overpower you.

*Giant:* Great difficulty to be encountered. But meet it with boldness. Then it will vanish. This indicates that you will have an enemy of the most dreadful character.

*Girl (unmarried):* Success, auspiciousness will come over you. Hopes will be fulfilled.

*God:* This is a rare dream which few people experience. Great success and elevation.

*Grave:* Some friend or relative will die. Recovery from illness doubtful.

*Hanging:* If you are hung, it is good to you. You will rise in society, and become wealthy.

*Heaven:* The remainder of your life will be spiritually happy, and your death will be peaceful.

*Hell:* There will be bodily suffering and also mental agony. Great suffering due to enemies and death of relatives, etc.

*Home:* To dream of home-life in early boyhood indicates good health and prosperity. Good sign of progress.

*Husband:* Your wish will not be granted. If you fall in love with another woman's husband, it indicates that you are growing vicious.

*Ill:* To dream that you are ill shows that you will have to fall a victim to some temptation, which, if you do not resist, will injure your character.

*Injury:* If you are injured by somebody else, it means that there are enemies to destroy you. Beware of them.



of locality is desirable.

*Itch:* This is an unlucky dream. Denotes much difficulty and trouble. You will be unhappy.

*Jail:* If you dream that you are in jail it indicates that in life you will prosper. This is a dream of contrary.

*Journey:* This indicates that there will be a great change in conditions and circumstances. Good journey indicates good conditions and bad journey with troubles indicates a bad life.

*King:* To appear before a friendly king is a sign of great success, and before a cruel king is very unfavourable.

*Lamp:* Very favourable dream. Very happy life. Family peaceful. This dream is always of good signs.

*Learning:* You will attain influence and respect. Good omen to dream that you are learning and acquiring knowledge.

*Leprosy:* To dream that you have leprosy always indicates a very great future misfortune. Perhaps you have committed some crime to be severely punished by law. You will have many enemies.

*Light:* To dream of lights is very good. It denotes riches and honour.

*Limbs:* Breakage of limbs indicates breakage of a marriage vow.

*Lion:* This dream indicates greatness, elevation and honour. You will become very important among men. You will become very powerful and happy.

*Money:* Receiving money in dream denotes earthly prosperity. Giving of it denotes ability to give money.

*Mother:* If you dream that you see your mother and converse with her, it indicates that you will have prosperity in life. To dream that you have lost your mother indicates her sickness.

*Murder:* To dream that you have murdered somebody denotes that you are going to become very bad and wretched, vicious and criminal.

*Nectar:* To drink nectar in dream indicates riches and prosperity. You will be beyond your expectations. You will marry a handsome person in high life and live in great state.

*Nightmare:* You are guided by foolish persons. Beware of such people.

*Noises:* To dream of hearing noises indicates quarrels in family and much misery in life.

*Ocean:* The state of life will be as the ocean is perceived to be in dream, viz., calm and peaceful life when the ocean is calm and troublesome life when the ocean is stormy, etc.

*Office:* If you dream that you are turned out of the office it means that you will die or lose all property. This is a very bad dream for all people.

*Owl:* Denotes sickness and poverty, disgrace and sorrow. After dreaming of an owl, one need not have any hope of prosperity in life.

*Palace:* To live in a palace is a good omen. You will be elevated to a state of wealth and dignity.

*Paradise:* This is a very good dream. Hope of immortality and entrance into Paradise. Cessation of sorrows. Happy and healthy life.

*Pigs:* This indicates a mixture of good and bad luck. You will have great troubles but you will succeed. Many enemies are there, but there are some who will help you.

*Rain:* This foretells trouble especially when it is heavy and boisterous. Gentle rain is a good dream indicating happy and calm life.

*River:* Rapid and flowing muddy river indicates great troubles and difficulties. But a river with calm glassy surface foretells happiness and love.

*Ship:* If you have a ship of your own sailing on the sea, it indicates advancement in riches. A ship that is tossed in the ocean and about to sink indicates disaster in life.

*Singing:* This is a dream of contrary. It indicates weeping and grief. Much suffering.

*Snakes:* You have sly and dangerous enemies who will injure your character and state of life.

*Thunder:* Great danger in life. Faithful friends will desert you. Thunder from a distance indicates that you will overcome troubles.

*Volcano:* Quarrels and disagreements in life.

*Water:* This indicates birth (of some person).

*Wedding:* This indicates that there is a funeral to be witnessed by you. To dream that you are married indicates that you will never marry. Marriage of sick persons indicates their death.

*Young:* To dream of young persons indicates enjoyment. If you are young, it indicates your sickness. You may die quickly.

# The First Precept:

## Reverence For Life

by Thich Nhat Hanh

"Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I undertake to cultivate compassion and learn ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life."

Life is precious. It is everywhere, inside us and all around us; it has so many forms.

The First Precept is born from the awareness that lives everywhere are being destroyed. We see the suffering caused by the destruction of life, and we undertake to cultivate compassion and use it as a source of energy for the protection of people, animals, plants, and minerals. The First Precept is a precept of compassion, *karuna* -- the ability to remove suffering and transform it. When we see suffering, compassion is born in us.

It is important for us to stay in touch with the suffering of the world. We need to nourish that awareness through many means -- sounds, images, direct contact, visits, and so on -- in order to keep compassion alive in us. But we must be careful not to take in too much. Any remedy must be taken in the proper dosage. We need to stay in touch with suffering only to the extent that we will not forget, so that compassion will flow within us and be a source of energy for our actions. If we use anger at injustice as the source for our energy, we may do something harmful, something that we will later regret. According to Buddhism, compassion is the only source of energy that is useful and safe. With compassion, your energy is born from insight; it is not blind energy.

We humans are made entirely of non-human elements, such as plants, minerals, earth, clouds, and sunshine. For our practice to be deep and true, we must include the ecosystem. If the environment is destroyed, humans will be destroyed, too. Protecting human life is not possible without also protecting the lives of animals, plants, and minerals. The Diamond Sutra teaches us that it is impossible to distinguish between sentient and non-sentient beings. This is one of many ancient Buddhist texts that teach deep ecology. Every Buddhist practitioner should be a protector of the environment. Minerals have their own lives, too. In Buddhist monasteries, we chant, "Both sentient and non-sentient beings will realize full enlightenment." The First Precept is the practice of protecting all lives, including the lives of minerals.

"I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life." We cannot support any act of killing; no killing can be justified. But not to kill is not enough. We must also learn ways to prevent others from killing. We cannot say, "I am not responsible. They did it. My hands are clean." If you were in Germany during the time of the Nazis, you could not say, "They did it. I did not." If, during the Gulf War, you did not say or do anything to try to stop the killing, you were not practicing this precept. Even if what you said or did failed to stop the war, what is important is that you tried, using your insight and compassion.

It is not just by not killing with your body that you observe the First Precept. If in your thinking you allow the killing to go on, you also break this precept. We must be determined not to condone killing, even in our minds. According to the Buddha, the mind is the base of all actions. It is most dangerous to kill in the mind. When you believe, for example, that yours is the only way for humankind and that everyone who follows another way is your enemy, millions of people could be killed because of that idea.

Thinking is at the base of everything. It is important for us to put an eye of awareness into each of our thoughts. Without a correct understanding of a situation or a person, our thoughts can be misleading and create confusion, despair, anger, or hatred. Our most important task is to develop correct insight. If we see deeply into the nature of interbeing, that all things "inter-are," we will stop blaming, arguing, and killing, and we will become friends with everyone. To practice nonviolence, we must first of all learn ways to deal peacefully with ourselves. If we create true harmony within ourselves, we will know how to deal with family, friends, and associates.

When we protest against a war, for example, we may assume that we are a peaceful person, a representative of peace, but this might not be true. If we look deeply, we will observe that the roots of war are in the unmindful ways we have been living. We have not sown enough seeds of peace and understanding in ourselves and others, therefore we are co-responsible: "Because I have been like this, they are like that." A more holistic approach is the way of "interbeing": "This is like this, because that is like that." This is the way of understanding and love. With this insight, we can see clearly and help our government see clearly. Then we can go to a demonstration and say, "This war is unjust, destructive, and not worthy of our great nation." This is far more effective than angrily condemning

others. Anger always accelerates the damage.

All of us, even pacifists, have pain inside. We feel angry and frustrated, and we need to find someone willing to listen to us who is capable of understanding our suffering. In Buddhist iconography, there is a bodhisattva named Avalokitesvara who has one thousand arms and one thousand hands, and has an eye in the palm of each hand. One thousand hands represent action, and the eye in each hand represents understanding. When you understand a situation or a person, any action you do will help and will not cause more suffering. When you have an eye in your hand, you will know how to practice true nonviolence.

To practice nonviolence, first of all we have to practice it within ourselves. In each of us, there is a certain amount of violence and a certain amount of nonviolence. Depending on our state of being, our response to things will be more or less nonviolent. Even if we take pride in being vegetarian, for example, we have to acknowledge that the water in which we boil our vegetables contains many tiny microorganisms. We cannot be completely nonviolent, but by being vegetarian, we are going in the direction of nonviolence. If we want to head north, we can use the North Star to guide us, but it is impossible to arrive at the North Star. Our effort is only to proceed in that direction. Anyone can practice some nonviolence, even army generals. They may, for example, conduct their operations in ways that avoid killing innocent people. To help soldiers move in the nonviolent direction, we have to be in touch with them. If we divide reality into two camps -- the violent and the nonviolent -- and stand in one camp while attacking the other, the world will never have peace. We will always blame and condemn those we feel are responsible for wars and social injustice, without recognizing the degree of violence in ourselves. We must work on ourselves and also work with those we condemn if we want to have a real impact.

It never helps to draw a line and dismiss some people as enemies, even those who act violently. We have to approach them with love in our hearts and do our best to help them move in a direction of nonviolence. If we work for peace out of anger, we will never succeed. Peace is not an end. It can never come about through non-peaceful means.

Most important is to become nonviolence, so that when a situation presents itself, we will not create more suffering. To practice nonviolence, we need gentleness, loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity directed to our bodies, our feelings, and other people. With mindfulness -- the practice of peace -- we can begin by working to transform the wars in ourselves. There are techniques for doing this. Conscious breathing is one. Every time we feel upset, we can stop what we are doing, refrain from saying anything, and breathe in and out several times, aware of each in-breath and each out-breath. If we are still upset, we can go for walking meditation, mindful of each slow step and each breath we take. By cultivating peace within, we bring about peace in society. It depends on us. To practice peace in ourselves is to minimize the numbers of wars between this and that feeling, or this and that perception, and we can then have real peace with others as well, including the members of our own family.

I am often asked, "What if you are practicing nonviolence and someone breaks into your house and tries to kidnap your daughter or kill your husband? What should you do? Should you still act in a nonviolent way?" The answer depends on your state of being. If you are prepared, you may react calmly and intelligently, in the most nonviolent way possible. But to be ready to react with intelligence and nonviolence, you have to train yourself in advance. It may take ten years, or longer. If you wait until the time of crisis to ask the question, it will be too late. A this-or-that kind of answer would be superficial. At that crucial moment, even if you know that nonviolence is better than violence, if your understanding is only intellectual and not in your whole being, you will not act nonviolently. The fear and anger in you will prevent you from acting in the most nonviolent way.

We have to look deeply every day to practice this precept well. Every time we buy or consume something, we may be condoning some form of killing.

While practicing the protection of humans, animals, plants, and minerals, we know that we are protecting ourselves. We feel in permanent and loving touch with all species on Earth. We are protected by the mindfulness and the loving kindness of the Buddha and many generations of Sanghas who also practice this precept. This energy of loving kindness brings us the feeling of safety, health, and joy, and this becomes real the moment we make the decision to receive and practice the First Precept.

Feeling compassion is not enough. We have to learn to express it. That is why love must go together with understanding. Understanding and insight show us how to act.

Our real enemy is forgetfulness. If we nourish mindfulness every day and water the seeds of peace in ourselves and those around us, we become alive, and we can help ourselves and others realize peace and compassion.

Life is so precious, yet in our daily lives we are usually carried away by our forgetfulness, anger, and worries, lost in the past, unable to touch life in the present moment. When we are truly alive, everything we do or touch is a miracle. To practice mindfulness is to return to life in the present moment. The practice of the First Precept is a celebration of reverence for life. When we appreciate and honor the beauty of life, we will do everything in our

# Going to the Shore of Non-suffering

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Good morning, my dear friends. Today is the thirteenth of August, 1997, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We still have one *paramita* to learn.

Paramita means perfection, the perfection of the crossing over to the other shore. We have seen that a paramita is not so difficult to practice; even children can do it. Paramita means from this shore of suffering we cross over to the other shore, the shore of well-being. From the shore of anger, we cross to the shore of non-anger. From the shore of jealousy, we cross over to the shore of non-jealousy. If you know how to do it, you can cross over to the other shore very quickly. It is a matter of training, it is a matter of practice, and you can do that with the help of another person or many other persons. It's nice to cross the stream of suffering together, hand in hand. So every time you want to cross, if you feel that alone it would be a little bit too difficult, you ask someone to hold your hand and you cross together the stream of suffering with him or with her.

If you feel you are caught in anger and that anger is a kind of fire burning you, you don't want that; you don't want to stay on this shore suffering from anger—you want to get relief, you want to cross to the other shore. You have to do something. Row your boat to go to the other side. Whether that is walking meditation, mindful breathing, or anything that you have learned here from Plum Village, it can be a boat helping you to cross over to the other shore. Next time when you feel that you don't like it on this shore, you have to make a determination to cross to the other shore. You may like to say to a person that you love that you don't want to stay here on this shore, you want to cross over to the other shore, and you may like to ask the other person to help you to cross. There are many things we can do together. Sitting and listening to the bell—we can do together, as two brothers, two sisters, as mother and child, or father and child. We can sit down and practice together.

I know a young mother who has a little boy of four years old, and every time the boy is agitated, not calm, not happy, she will take his hand and ask him to sit down and practice breathing in and out with her. She told her child to think of the abdomen, the belly, and breathing in seeing the belly expanding, rising, and breathing out seeing the belly falling. They practice breathing together like that three or four or five times, and they always feel better. If the mother left her baby alone to breathe, it would be a little bit difficult for him because he is so young, he cannot do it alone. That is why the mother sits next to him, and holds his hand, and promises to practice breathing in and out together. I have seen that, I have seen the mother and the child practicing in front of me. Because one day I had tea with them—the little boy wanted to have tea with me—so I offered him some tea, and we had a nice time together. Suddenly there was something, he became unhappy and agitated, so his mother asked him to practice that in front of me, and both did very well. So mother has to learn to practice with her child. Father also has to learn to practice with his child. This is a very good habit, a very good tradition, a husband has to learn to do it his

husband has to learn to do it his wife, a partner has to learn to do it with her partner.

Every time there is one of us who is not happy, we have to help him, to help her, to go to the other shore. We have to support him, support her. We shall not say, "That is your problem," no. There is no such thing as your problem; it is a problem for everyone. If one person suffers, then everyone around has to suffer too. If a father tells his son or his daughter, "That is your problem," that means the father has not got the insight. There is no such thing as your problem, because you are my son, you are my daughter, and if you have a problem, that is our problem, not yours only. Because if happiness is not an individual matter, suffering also is not an individual matter. You have to help and support each other to cross the river of suffering. So next time when you feel unhappy, you cry, you don't want to be unhappy, then you may like to ask your father, your mother, your brothers, and your sisters to help. "Please help. I don't want to stay on this shore. I want to cross over." Then they come and they will help you. He, she will help you.

You should know the practice. We should know how to practice walking meditation, to practice sitting and breathing in and out with our attention focused on our belly. We can invite the bell, to listen together. Every time you feel unhappy or angry, always you can practice listening to the bell. I guarantee that after having practiced three sounds of the bell, you will feel much better.

That is why it would be very helpful for each family to have a bell, a small bell, at least. I don't know whether they have small bells available in the shops, but I think that a bell is very useful. That is why children who come to Plum Village, they are always taught how to invite a bell. If we use a bell, then the whole family has to practice together. It's not possible that one person practices the bell and all the others talk and don't practice. We have to make an agreement within the family that every time there is a sound of the bell, everyone will have to stop—not only stop talking but stop thinking—and begin to breathe in and breathe out mindfully. Your breathing will become deeper, slower, and more harmonious after several seconds. You know you are crossing while you breathe in and out mindfully and listen to the bell. You are actually crossing the stream of suffering. Maybe in Chinatown you can find a bell somewhere, and I think that Plum Village has to arrange so that there are bells in the shop, so that everyone in the family can get one.

I propose that in each home, each family, there be a bell, and I propose that we arrange so that in each house there is one place to practice listening to the bell and breathing in and breathing out. In our house, there are rooms for everything. There is a room for guests, there is a room for playing, there is a room for eating, there is a room for sitting, for everything. Now, as a civilized family, we have to invent another room. I call it the breathing room. Or you might like to call it the practice room, or meditation room—a room that is for the restoration of peace, of joy, of stability. It is very important. You have a very beautiful room for television, and you don't have a room for your own peace, your own joy, your own stability. That's a pity. No matter how poor we are, we have to arrange so that we have a small place, a room in our family, to take refuge in every time we suffer. That room represents the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. When you step into that room, you are protected by mindfulness, by the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Children have to take care of that room. Because according to the practice, once they get into that room, no one can shout at them any more, including parents, because that is the territory of peace. You can take refuge in that, and no one can shout at you and chase after you any more. It is like the compound of an embassy. The compound of an embassy belongs to the territory of that country, and no one can invade that.

That is why in each home we should have such a room, very sacred. You should not use that room for other purposes. You should not go into that room to play chess, to play the radio, to do other things. That room is just for the practice of breathing, of listening to the bell, of sitting meditation, of listening to the dharma talks, dharma discussions. That room should be only for peace, for the restoration of peace and joy. When you know that there is someone in the room practicing, you should respect that, and not make a lot of noise. You know when you drive through a zone where there is a hospital, you know that many sick people are in the hospital and they need quiet—that is why you don't blow the horn, you don't make a lot of noise. The same thing is true when you know that there is someone in a meditation hall, in the breathing room; you should try not to make noise in the house. If mother is in the meditation room, then

the meditation room, then you should turn off your phonograph or your television. This is a very good practice.

Every time you get angry, you get upset, you suffer, you know that you need the breathing room. So you think of the breathing room, and as soon as you begin to think of the breathing room, you feel already a little bit better; you know what to do. You don't accept to stay there without doing anything, just to be a victim of your anger, of your suffering. That is why you slowly stand up, you breathe in, breathe out mindfully, and you begin to walk in the direction of the breathing room. "Breathing in, I make one step, breathing out, I make one step." When people see you doing like that, they will have a lot of respect: "This person, although she is very young, she knows how to take care of her anger and her suffering." Everyone will be looking at you with respect, and they will stop laughing and talking loudly; they might follow their breathing to support you. That is the practice. Mother and father—who have received the teaching, who know what it is like to be in anger, who know how to practice when they get angry—mother and father will stop talking and breathe in and breathe out and follow you with their eyes, until you open the door and enter inside. Holding the knob of the door, you breathe in; pulling the door, you breathe out; and you go into it and you close the door behind you peacefully. You bow to the flower in the room—because it would be wonderful to keep one flower alive in that meditation hall, any kind of flower. That flower represents something fresh, beautiful, the Buddha inside of us.

You don't need a lot of things in that breathing room. You need only a pot of flowers—if you have a nice drawing of the Buddha, you can put that—otherwise, one pot of flowers, that will be enough. And one bell, one small bell. I trust that when you go home you will try your best to set up that important room within your home. And you bow to the flower, you just sit down. Maybe you have a cushion—a child should have his or her own cushion—and you need a cushion that fits you, where you can sit beautifully and with stability for five or ten minutes. Then you practice holding the bell in the palm of your hand, you practice breathing in, breathing out, as you have been instructed, and then you invite the bell, and you practice breathing in and breathing out. You practice listening to the bell and breathing in and out several times until your anger and your suffering are calmed down. If you enjoy it, you may like to stay there longer.

You are doing something very important—you are making the living Dharma present in your home. Because the living Dharma is not a Dharma talk. A Dharma talk may not be a living Dharma, but what you are doing—walking peacefully, breathing mindfully, crossing the river of anger—that is a real Dharma and you, it is you who are practicing, who are crossing, so you inspire a lot of respect. Even your parents have to respect you because you embody the Dharma, the living Dharma. And I will be very proud of you. If I see you, I will know that you are doing so.

I know of a family in Switzerland, a family of seven or eight brothers and sisters, a very big family, and they spent time in Plum Village, they learned about these things, and one day while they were home they got into a kind of dispute. Usually one month or two after coming back from Plum Village, you can still keep the atmosphere of peace alive. But beyond three months, you begin to lose your practice. You become less and less mindful, and you begin to quarrel with each other. So that day, everyone in the family was talking at the same time—all the brothers and sisters except one, the youngest. She suffered, she didn't know why all the brothers and sisters quarreled and suffered at the same time, so it was she who remembered that the bell is needed. So she stood up and reached for the bell, she breathed in and breathed out, and she invited the bell, and suddenly mindfulness came back. Everyone stopped shouting at once, everyone was breathing in and out, and after that everyone burst out laughing, and laughing, and laughing, and made peace with each other. That was thanks to the youngest member of the family. I think she was five at that time. Now she is fourteen, and she is here now today.

[Bell]

If you are an adult, you can practice like that, like your child. Every time you get angry at your husband, at your wife, at your brother, or at your child, you can do like that. Instead of arguing and shouting, you stand up, you breathe in and out, and you practice walking meditation to your breathing room. Your child will see it, your husband, your wife, will see it. They will have respect for you, they know that you

breathing room. Your child will see it, your husband, your wife, will see it. They will have respect for you, they know that you are able to handle your anger, to take care of yourself, to love yourself. They will stop what they have been doing, and they may begin to practice.

When you are in the breathing room, inviting the bell, listening to the bell deeply, and practicing breathing, one of your children may like to join you. So while breathing, you may hear the sound of the door opening smoothly. You know that someone in the family is joining you; that may be your child that may be your husband or your wife. You feel much better that you are not practicing as an individual any longer, but you are practicing as a Sangha. That will warm up your heart, as you feel that someone is sitting close to you and beginning to breathe in and breathe out—this is wonderful. Maybe the person—the person who made you angry—after a few moments, feels that he will have to join you in practice. Then you hear the door opening again, and there, he's coming and sitting close to you, and you are flanked by the two people you love the most in the world, practicing breathing in and out. There is no one to take a picture of all of you, but that is the most beautiful picture that could be taken of the family. Maybe you do not have any lipstick or powder on your face, you do not wear the best dress, but there you are in the most beautiful state of being, because all of you know how to practice. All of you embody the living Dharma at this moment. This is something we have to learn—this is a good habit, it's a good tradition, and you are truly the sons and the daughters of the Buddha.

I would like to transmit to the young people today something that they may use in the future. That is a cake. But this cake is not visible now. If it happens that your mother and your father get into a dispute—that happens from time to time—and you don't like these moments, the tension in the family, the disagreements between your father and your mother. The tension is coming up, one of them said something not very nice to the other, and you suffer. It is like the sky just before a storm. It is a heavy, oppressive atmosphere and a child always suffers in such a condition. I have been a child, and I did suffer when the atmosphere in the family was heavy and oppressive like that. But you know that you should not continue to be a victim because it's not healthy to stay long in such an atmosphere. You should do something. There are children who try to run away, but their apartment is too small and they are on the fifth floor. There is no garden around. So they could not get away.

Many children choose to go into the bathroom and lock the door to avoid the tension and heavy atmosphere in the family. Unfortunately, even in the bathroom the atmosphere was still felt. It's not healthy to be in such an atmosphere. Father and mother do not want to make their child suffer, but they cannot help it—they get into a tension, a conflict. In that moment, I would suggest that you do this: you pull the dress of your mother and you say, "Mommy, it seems that there is a cake in the refrigerator." Just do that; this is another mantra that I am transmitting to you. Whether there is a cake or there is no cake in the refrigerator, you just open your mouth, after having breathed in and out three times, and you say, "Mommy, there is a cake in the refrigerator." Just say that.

It may happen that there is a cake. Your mother will say, "That's true. Why don't you bring some chairs to the backyard? I will make some coffee and bring the cake down for you and for your daddy." She will say that, and she will take the excuse to withdraw to the kitchen. Because she also wants to cross to the other shore; she doesn't want to stay there forever and get destroyed. But if there is no pretext, it would be impolite, provocative, to just leave like that. So you help her. You say, "Mommy, it seems that there is a cake in the refrigerator," and she will know, she is intelligent, she knows what you mean. You mean that you don't want this to continue. Then when you hear your mother say this, you say "Yes!" and you run, you run away. You run to the backyard, you arrange some chairs and you clean the table back there. Your Mommy will go into the kitchen, she will boil some water for tea, she will ask you to come and help bring the cake to the backyard and so on. Both of you are doing these things and practicing mindful breathing together. It is very nice, and I will be very proud of you both. You know that you can do it. Please.

Then your father, left alone in the living room, he has seen that, and he has been in Plum Village, so he knows that his wife and his child are practicing. He feels ashamed if he doesn't practice. So he stays there and practices breathing in and out also. He may join you in the backyard with the cake, and the three of you will be over to the other shore in just ten minutes. Don't worry if there is no cake in the refrigerator



refrigerator because your mommy is very talented. She can always fix something.

So this is a cake that I want to transmit to you today, a cake that never disappears. This kind of cake is forever. This is one way of practicing paramita—crossing over. There are many Dharma doors. Dharma doors mean methods of practice. The breathing room is one Dharma door, a wonderful Dharma door. In the next century that's coming in two years, I want to see in every home a breathing room, a sign of civilization. If you are a writer, if you are an artist, if you are a reporter, if you are a novelist, if you are a filmmaker, please help. If you are an educator, a Dharma teacher, please help. In every home, there will be a breathing room for us to take care of our nerves, of our peace, of our joy. We cannot be without a breathing room. So the breathing room is one Dharma door that we have to open to the new century, and the cake is also a Dharma door.

When you hear the bell, please stand up and bow to the Sangha before you go out.

[Bell]

The last pebble, we call it *virya* paramita: the continued growth, the continued transformation. We know that when we cook potatoes, we have to keep the pot covered and should not take the lid off because the heat might get out. Also, we have to keep the fire on underneath. If we turn the fire off, then the potatoes could not cook. After five minutes, if we turn the fire out, then we cannot expect the potatoes to cook, even if we turn on the fire for another five minutes, and we turn it off. That is why there should be continued progress, continued practice, the continuation, the steady practice—that is called *virya*.

In terms of consciousness, we know that there are seeds to be watered and there are seeds to be transformed, and if we can continue to water the positive seeds and to refrain from watering the negative seeds, instead we know how to transform them—that is the process of continued transformation. Let us visualize our consciousness. This circle represents our consciousness, and the lower part is called "store consciousness" (*alayavijñāna*) and the upper part is called "mind consciousness" (*manovijñāna*). [Thay draws a diagram.] We know that in our store consciousness there are all kinds of seeds, positive and negative, buried here, and there are something like 51 categories of seeds. If it is a negative seed, the practice consists in preventing it from manifesting itself in the upper part of consciousness. You recognize that there is a negative seed in you and you would not like it to be watered, because if it is watered then it will have a chance to manifest itself in the upper level of your consciousness and it will become a mental formation.

Suppose this is a seed of anger. As far as it accepts to stay still in the store consciousness, you can survive, you are fine, you can smile, you can be joyful, you can even be happy with the seed of anger in you, with the condition that it accepts to stay still. But if someone comes and waters it, touches it, or you yourself water it, then it will manifest itself on the level of mind consciousness. And there is a zone of energy called anger, and it makes the whole scenery unpleasant. It may stay here for some time, maybe for a few minutes, sometimes a half hour, sometimes the whole day, and the more it stays, the more you suffer. And the more it is here, manifested, the stronger it becomes at the base. So if you allow it to manifest, you get two disadvantages. The first is that you suffer up here, and the second is that it grows bigger here. That is why the practice of *virya* consists in not giving it a chance to manifest.

So if you love yourself, if you care for yourself, you have to arrange so that you will be protected, you will not touch it and water it, and you ask your friends not to water it. "My dear, if you really love me, don't water that negative seed in me. You know I have that weakness; I have that seed in me. If you water that seed in me, I will suffer and you will suffer too." So if we love each other, we should know each other, we should know the negative seeds in each other, and we should practice so that we do not water them every day. This is the practice of *virya*. We should plead with the people around us. "Dear people, you know me, you know my weakness, you know these seeds in me. So, please, if you love me, if you do care for me, please refrain, please do your best to protect me and not to touch, to water these seeds in me." We have to sign a peace treaty. We don't practice alone, we practice with a Sangha, with the people we love, also.

If it has already manifested, then we should know the ways to embrace it and to help it go back as soon

soon as possible to the store consciousness. Because the sooner it goes back, the better you can feel; because here you don't have to suffer long, and down here it doesn't have a chance to grow too big. That is the first meaning of virya. The negative should not be encouraged to manifest. And if it has manifested, do whatever you can to take care of it and to have it go back down here as soon as possible.

Third, the good seeds. Please do whatever you can in order for them to manifest as wholesome mental formations. If you know how to love yourself, to take care of yourself, then please look and realize that you have good seeds in you, seeds that have been transmitted by your ancestors, your teachers, your friends. You do whatever you can to allow them a chance to manifest. Because mind consciousness is like a living room, and you would like to invite into your living room only the pleasant people. With a beautiful pleasant person in your living room, you know it is very pleasant, you enjoy it. So don't allow your living room to be visited by unpleasant people. Invite only beautiful people, pleasant people to be there. That is the third practice of virya. You do that by yourself. You have all the seeds of happiness in here. You have a poem, you have a song, you have a thought, you have a practice, and every time you touch that, you invite it to the upper level of your consciousness and then you feel wonderful, and you keep it in your mind consciousness as long as possible.

Your mind is like a television set, or rather, it is like a computer with many hard disks down here. This is the screen of your computer; you can invite whatever you have down here up there. Selective invitation that is your practice. You invite only the things that are pleasant. Sometimes the pleasant things are buried down here under many layers of unpleasant things, so you need to help, so that you can take these jewels up to the screen. Leave them up as long as you can, keep them as long as you can, in the upper level of your consciousness. A piece of music, a poem, a happy souvenir, the seed of love, the seed of compassion, the seed of joy—all these positive seeds in you should be recognized and should be touched, should be invited. You ask the people around you, the ones who share your life, "Please my darling, please my friends, if you really love me, really want to help me, please recognize the positive seeds in me and please help these seeds to be touched, to be watered every day." That is the practice of love. To love means to practice selective watering of the seeds within the other person and within yourself.

Whatever good, pleasant seed is manifested here, we try our best to keep it as long as we can. Why? Because if it stays long in here, at the base it will grow. This is the teaching in the *abhidharma*, the Buddhist psychology. Buddhist psychology speaks of consciousness in terms of seeds. *Bija* is a seed and we have all kinds of seeds within our store consciousness. Store consciousness is sometimes called the totality of the seeds (*savabijaka*). Seeds transform into mental formations. Unwholesome seeds are born here in the mind consciousness as unwholesome mental formations. Wholesome seeds are manifested as wholesome mental formations.

So take care of your living room. Take good care of the screen of your computer and do not allow the negative things to come up. And allow, invite, the positive things to come up and keep them as long as you can. There will be a transformation at the base if you know how to do it. This is the virya paramita: continued practice, continued growth, continued transformation—it should be the same.

[Bell]

Now we should go back to other paramitas. [Thay writes on board.] First is *dana* (giving). Second is *prajña* (insight). This is *shila* (precepts or mindfulness training). This is *dhyana* (meditation), consisting of stopping and looking deeply. And this is *ksanti*, translated in Plum Village as inclusiveness. If you only participated in one of the four weeks in Plum Village, you may like to listen to other dharma talks in order to understand, to have a clearer and deeper understanding of the other five paramitas. We have been showing the nature of inter-being between the six paramitas. If you practice one of the paramitas deeply, you practice all six. You cannot understand one paramita unless you understand all the other five.

So continued practice here means that you continue to practice giving; you continue to practice the mindfulness trainings, you continue to practice inclusiveness (embracing whatever there is), continue to

to practice stopping, calming, and looking deeply. And you continue to practice understanding. All five are the contents of the sixth. And this is true of all of the paramitas. We have used Dana paramita as an example, because understanding is a gift, a great gift. To be able to stop, to calm, and to look deeply is a great gift. To continue your practice is a great gift. To practice embracing everything, including what you may think to be unpleasant in the beginning, that is also a gift. Living according to the five mindfulness trainings is also a great gift. So you cannot practice giving unless you practice the five other paramitas. And this can be applied with all the paramitas, the inter-being of the six paramitas.

In the beginning, I told the children that you don't need money at all to practice Dana. You offer your freshness, you offer your presence, you offer your stability, your solidity, your freedom. That's a lot already. And these things can be cultivated by the practice of the other paramitas.

All the six paramitas have the power to carry us over to the other shore so that we will not suffer anymore. After some time, training yourself, you'll arrive at the state of being when you can cross the stream of suffering very easily and very quickly. You have to master the practice, and you are no longer afraid. It is like knowing how to make tofu. If you know that there is no longer any tofu in the house, you are not afraid. A few hours and then you have tofu again. You know how to garden, to practice organic gardening. You know that there are heaps of garbage in your garden. You are not afraid because you know how to transform the garbage back into compost, and you are not afraid at all. While transforming the garbage into the compost, you can be very joyful. Therefore, we are no longer afraid of the garbage in us, the afflictions, the suffering in us. We know how to handle them, how to transform them; therefore, crossing to the other shore is a joy. You don't have to suffer even while crossing. You don't think that only when you arrive at the other shore you stop suffering, no. Crossing is already a pleasure.

It's like a child, when she knows that there is a breathing room, she stands up, and she practices walking meditation to the breathing room, and she already feels better because she knows the way, she knows what to do. So if you train yourself in the six paramitas, they will become a habit, a tradition, a routine; and every time you want to cross, you just cross, and not making a lot of effort, you just cross. It's like how you walk, you practice walking meditation. And you will not suffer any setbacks. You train yourself until you arrive at the state of being called the state of no setbacks, always progressing, not backsliding. That is the meaning of virya. You have mastered the techniques, the ways. That is why you never go back to the state of utmost suffering in which you were caught before.

Life is a continuation of transformation; it's just like gardening. You cannot expect that your garden will only produce flowers—your garden does produce garbage. That is the meaning of life. Those who suffer don't know the art of transformation—that is why they suffer, because of the garbage in them—they don't know how to transform. But you, you know the art of transformation; that is why you can embrace even your suffering, and you are able to transform. You never get back to the state of being overwhelmed, not knowing what to do with your suffering. If you train yourself in the six paramitas, one day you will feel that you are no longer afraid of any suffering. It's like doing the dishes. Of course, every day you have to use dishes, you have to eat, and therefore you produce dirty dishes. But for us, making dishes clean is very easy. We have detergent, we have water, we have soap, we have the time, we know how to breathe in, breathe out, how to sing while doing the dishes. So doing the dishes is no longer a problem. It can be very joyful. So you don't suffer a setback any more, just because you know the way, you know the paramitas, you have the boats to cross over to the shore.

In the bell there are a few questions that I have not answered. The newest questions that I have are these two. "Thay, why don't I feel that I love myself? I am unable to love myself." That is one question. And the other question is: "Without anger, without hate, how could I have the energy to work for social justice? How could you really love your enemy? If you love your enemy, what kind of energy is left for you to step up your struggle. If you accept your enemies as they are and then you do nothing?" So these two questions, I think they are linked to each other. And I think that the elements of the answers to these questions have already been offered in the Dharma talks. But we need to work with ourselves, we have to practice mindful breathing, mindful walking, looking deeply, and recognize all the seeds in order to see the true nature of inter-being, then we could understand the real answers to these questions—not

these questions – not only as theory, but also as practice.

"Why don't I love myself? Why is it so difficult for me to love myself?" The question can be answered by yourself, if you look into what you call "love," what you call "self." You have an idea of love, an idea of self that is very vague. If you look deeply into what you call love, if you look deeply into what you call self, then you will not feel that way anymore. Self is made of what? Of non-self elements. Looking into yourself deeply, you can see all the non-self elements within you.

When I look into my store consciousness, I see the seed of hate, the seed of fear, the seed of jealousy, but I also can see the seed of generosity, the seed of compassion, the seed of understanding. So these seeds must be opposing each other, fighting each other within me, like good and evil fighting, the angel and the beast. They are always fighting within me. How could I have peace at all? It seems that you have something in you that you are not ready to accept. There is a judge in you, that is a seed, and there is a criminal that is being judged in you, and both are not working together in you. So there is a deep division in you, a deep sense of duality within yourself, and that is why you feel that you are alienated from yourself. You cannot love yourself, you cannot accept yourself. But if you know how to look at things in the light of inter-being, you know that everything is linked to everything else and the garbage can always serve as the food for the growth of the flower.

The other day I said that while walking in the Upper Hamlet, enjoying so much the flowers, the vegetation, the beauty, I came to a place where I saw there was some excrement left by a dog or something like that. I told the children I did not mind because I have a great trust in the earth. Earth is great, earth has a big power of transformation, and I know that earth will be able to transform the dirty things into nutritive elements soon for the vegetation. So I still continued to smile, and I didn't mind at all. I saw the inter-being nature of the two things, the flower and the excrement. Looking in one, I saw the other.

The same thing is true with garbage and flower, afflictions and compassion and happiness. All mental formations in us are of an organic nature. If we know how to take care, to embrace, we will be able to transform and we will make the afflictions into the kind of nutriment that will grow, that will help my wisdom, my understanding, my love, my compassion, to grow. If you have that kind of insight into yourself, that both garbage and flowers inter-are, you would be able to accept the negative things in you in the way an organic gardener would be able to accept the garbage in her garden, because she knows that she needs the garbage in order to nourish her flowers. You are no longer caught in the dualistic view, you suffer much less.

Then when you look back, look deeply into your so-called self, you see that your self is made of non-self elements. What you don't like in you, you are not responsible for alone. Your society, your parents, your ancestors are equally responsible. They have transmitted those seeds to you because they have not had a chance to recognize them. They did not have a chance to learn how to transform them, that is why they have transmitted them to you. Now you have an opportunity to recognize them, to learn ways to transform them, and you take the vow to transform them for your sake and for the sake of your ancestors, your parents, your society. That is the vow of a great being, of a bodhisattva.

So if you understand things like that, you will not say, "Why don't I love myself?" It is possible to love yourself. The way offered in Plum Village is very concrete, how to love yourself. Your self, first of all, is made of your body. You love yourself by the way you eat, you drink, you rest, you relax. You don't love yourself because you don't practice these things, you don't allow your body to rest. You force your body to consume the things that destroy it. So how to love your body, it is written down very clearly in the teaching of Plum Village: mindfully eating, mindfully consuming, mindfully allowing your body to rest and to restore itself. When we come to Plum Village, we have to learn these things. Sometimes you don't love yourself, you destroy yourself, and yet you don't know. The Buddha said that there are people who think that they are the lovers of themselves, but in fact they are enemies of themselves. They are doing harmful things to themselves, they are destroying themselves, and yet they think that they are loving themselves. They destroy themselves with their lack of mindfulness in eating, in drinking, in dealing

eating, in drinking, in dealing with their body, with their feelings, with their consciousness.

When you have a feeling – pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral – do you know how to recognize it? Do you know how to embrace it? To calm it? That is the process of loving. When you come to Plum Village, you have to learn these methods of recognizing, accepting, calming, and transforming. To love means to practice – to practice looking, seeing, understanding, and transforming. When you love yourself like that, you love other people also. You love your ancestors, you love your parents, you love your children and their children, and you love us all by taking good care of yourself and loving yourself. Because you are made of us. Your self is made of non-self elements, including ancestors, clouds, sky, river, forest, and us.

You may say, "I want to love myself, but I don't feel that I can love myself." If you understand the teaching, if you can look into yourself and the nature of love, you see that love is a process of practice. Unless you practice, according to the teaching, you are not loving yourself at all, and not loving yourself, you cannot love anyone. Because self-love is at the same time the love for others. The moment when you know how to breathe in mindfully and smile, you make yourself feel better and you make the person in front of you, behind you, feel better also.

As far as hate is concerned, it is the same. You say that there is a lot of social injustice and other people are doing evil things to destroy themselves, to destroy you, to destroy the world, and it feels good to be angry at them. But who are they, who are you? You feel that you have to do something to help the world, to help society, but who is the world, who is the society?

When you see delinquent children, caught in drugs, in violence, and locked up in prisons, do you think that you should hate them or you should love them? You should take care of them. Why do they behave like that? Why do they look for drugs? Why do they have recourse to violence? Why do they oppose their parents, their society? There must be reasons why they do so. One day they may kill you, they may use a gun and shoot you down, they may burn your car. Of course, you can get angry at them, you can fight them, and if you have a gun you might like to shoot them down before they shoot you. But that doesn't prevent them from being the victims of society, of their education, of their ancestors, because they have not been well taken care of. Punishing them would not help them; there must be another way to help them. Killing them would not help them.

There was a sea pirate who raped a small girl of twelve years old on a refugee boat. Her father tried to intervene, and they threw her father into the ocean and he drowned. After the girl was raped, she was so ashamed, she suffered so much – also because of the death of her father – she jumped into the ocean and drowned.

That kind of tragedy took place almost every day when there were boat people. There was not a day when we did not receive news like that in the office of the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation in Paris during the war. I remember the morning when I read the report about that girl, I did not eat my breakfast, I went into the woods. I practiced walking meditation, embracing the trees, and so on. Because I felt I was being raped and I was one with that child. I was angry at first. But I knew that I had to take good care of myself, because if I let the anger overwhelm me, make me paralyzed, then I could not go on with the work I should do, the work of peace and taking care of the victims of the war. Because at that time, at the office of the Buddhist Peace Delegation in Paris, we took care of providing the delegations in the peace talks with real information, trying to stop the war, and trying to relieve the suffering of war victims, including orphans and so on. At that time we were able to get support for more than 8,000 war orphans to continue to live and to go to school. So we could not afford to be paralyzed by such news that came every day into the office, so we had to practice together. Without mindful breathing, mindful walking, and renewing ourselves, how could we go on with our work when we were flooded with information like that about the war?

That night in sitting meditation, I saw myself born in a fishing village along the coast of Thailand, because I was meditating on the sea pirate. I saw myself as born in the family of a poor fisherman, and my father was very poor. My mother also was very poor. Poverty had been there for many generations. My father got drunk every night because the work was so hard and he earned so little, and he beat me

how to raise a child, and I became a delinquent child, playing with other delinquent children in the village along the coast of Thailand. At the age of 12, I already followed my father to the sea to help him with the fishing. I had seen girls and boys who were dressed in beautiful dress, who went to school in their beautiful automobiles, and I felt that I would never enjoy that kind of life at all.

Now I am a fisherman on my own. I have my fishing boat, and yesterday someone told me that the refugees very often bring with them some gold, and if I just go and take that gold just one time, I will be able to get out of this kind of chronic poverty and that will give me a chance to live like other people. So without understanding, without compassion, just with that kind of aspiration, I agreed to go with him as a sea pirate. When out in the sea I saw the other pirates robbing and raping the girl, I felt these negative seeds in me also come up very strong—there is no policeman around, there is freedom, you can do everything you like here, nobody sees you—so I became a sea pirate, and I raped the twelve-year-old girl, and she jumped into the river. Nobody knows. I have some gold now.

If you are there on the boat and if you have a gun, you can shoot me, I will die. Yes, I will die and that is the end of my life. You shoot me, yes; you can prevent me from raping the girl, yes; but you cannot help me. No one has helped me since the time I was born until I became a 18-year-old fisherman. No one has tried to help me—no educator, no politician, no one has done anything to help me. My family has been locked in the situation of chronic poverty for many hundreds of years. I died, but you did not help me.

In my meditation, I saw the sea pirate. And I saw also that that night along the coast of Thailand, 200-300 babies were born to poor fishermen. I saw very clearly that if no one tried to help them, then in 18 years many of them would become sea pirates. If you were born into the situation of that sea pirate, if I were born into the situation of that pirate, then you and I could become sea pirates in 18 years. So when I was able to see that, compassion began to spring up in my heart, and suddenly I accepted the sea pirate.

You have to do something to help them, otherwise they will become sea pirates. Shooting them is okay, but it does not solve the problem. Locking up the people who use drugs and who do violence is okay, but that is not the best thing to do. There are better things to do. There are things you can do to prevent them from being what they are now, and that is the work of love. In the enemy, you can see the beloved one. That does not mean that I would allow them to continue the crime, the violence, to destroy. I would do whatever I could to prevent them from causing harm, but that does not prevent me from loving them. Compassion is another kind of energy.

You say that anger is a formidable source of energy that pushes you to act. But anger prevents you from being clear in mind, from being clear sighted. Anger cannot give you lucidity, and in anger you can do many wrong things. As parents, we should not teach our children when we are angry. Teaching our children when we are angry is not the best time. It does not mean that we should not teach them, but we teach them only when we are no longer angry. We don't teach with the energy of anger, we teach only with the energy of love, of compassion. That is true with the sea pirates, with the people who are destroying life. We have to act, but we should not use the energy of anger as fuel. We have to use the energy of sacrifice, the energy of compassion.

Great beings like the Buddha or Jesus Christ, they know the power of compassion, of love. And there are people among us who are ready to suffer, to die, for love. Please don't underestimate the power of compassion, of love. With the energy of compassion in you, you continue to remain lucid and understanding is there. When understanding is there, you will not make a mistake. You are motivated by love, but love is born from understanding.

[Bell]

Many of us are motivated by the desire to do something for social change, for restoring social justice. But many of us get frustrated after a period of time because we don't know how to take care of ourselves. We think that the evil is only in the other side, but we know that the evil is within us. Craving, anger, delusion, jealousy—they are in us. If we don't know how to take care of them, to reduce their importance, to help the positive qualities in us grow, we would not be able to continue our work, and we'll be discouraged very soon, overwhelmed by despair. There are many groups of young people who are

reduce their importance, to help the positive qualities in us grow, we would not be able to continue our work, and we'll be discouraged very soon, overwhelmed by despair. There are many groups of young people who are strongly motivated by the desire for social action, but because they don't know how to take good care of themselves, they don't know how to live and work with harmony among themselves, they give up the struggle after some time.

That is why it is very important that we take good care of ourselves, and then learn to look at the other people not only as criminals but also as victims. Of course, we should do everything we can to stop them in the course of their destruction. But we should also see that they are to be helped at the same time. We should be able to make it very clear to them that, "If you do this, we will try to stop you by whatever means we feel that we need, but we will do it with love and compassion. We will try to stop you, to prevent you from doing whatever you try to do to us and to your victims, but that does not mean that we are acting with hatred or anger. No, we do that with love. If you know how to go in that direction, we will support you wholeheartedly because it is our desire, our hope, that you move in the direction of harmony, of nondiscrimination, of social equality."

We have to make it very clear, because in that person there is a friend, and there is an enemy in him or in her at the same time. The enemy is the negative seeds, and the friend is the positive seeds. We should not kill the friend in him, we should only kill the enemy in him; and to kill the enemy in him is to recognize the negative seed in him and try to transform it, to not allow the situation to be favorable for the continuation of crime and destruction.

So that is a strategy, because to practice you need a strategy. You need a lot of intelligence, of deep looking, and you also need a lot of compassion and love. In the context of social change, we have to practice together. We have to unite our insights. We have to bring our compassion and insight together in order to succeed. We know that only love, only compassion and understanding, can really bring a change, because hatred cannot be removed by hatred. This is something said by the Buddha in the *Dhammapada*, hatred can never be removed by hatred.

[Bell]

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# The Good, Beautiful, And True Is In Us

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Dear friends, today is the 20th of November 1997, we are in the New Hamlet. There is a French writer whose name is Antoine de Saint Exupéry. He said that to love each other doesn't mean we sit and look at each other, but it means we both look in the same direction. We have to look deeply to see whether in our experience this is true or not, and if it's true, to what degree it is true. When we love each other, we have a natural tendency to look at each other. Because each one of us has lacks, needs, desires. We want beauty we are thirsty for beauty. We respect and look up to truth, and we are thirsty for truth. We are thirsty for sincerity. So we are looking for something sacred, something beautiful, something good, and something wholesome. And then we will feel we don't lack, and we will feel less lonely, at a loss.

The beautiful, the true and the good which we look for is something we look for in a person, and we think that there are few people who have that thing. But we have a wrong perception. Because sometimes the beauty we think is real beauty is not true beauty. The truth is not real truth and we think it's real truth. And the wholesome, we think it is true, but it's not real goodness. So if we are basing on our wrong perception then our love can arise based on that wrong perception. And when we have lived with that person for a period of time, we discover that we have failed. Because that person is not able to symbolize for us the beautiful, good, and true that we were looking for and we say that person has deceived us, and we suffer. And then we go and look for a second object.

Every one of us in the beginning feels that we lack something, that we are only half a person. And we wander around in this world to look for our other half. We're like a saucepan that hasn't got a lid, and we're always going looking for our lid. That is why we feel we lack the other person. But if we observe carefully, we see that this feeling of lack arises from a wrong perception. We have an inferiority complex that the true, the good, and the beautiful do not exist in us. That is a very deep complex in every one of us. We have a perception that we are not worthy. No truth, no beauty, no goodness is in us. And there is no way that we can have confidence in ourselves. We don't say these things, but it is what we feel. We feel that we haven't any beauty, goodness and truth.

But we always want to do something in order to have these things. And so we feel that we are deceiving people. We are showing other people that we are good, that we are beautiful, but we feel that we are only showing that on the outside. In ourselves, we are not really beautiful, not really good. And so we go and look for different cosmetics in order to adorn ourselves. We go to shops which sell cosmetics, and we buy powder, we buy lipstick and we put it on our lips. Or we use some kind of operation to make us look more beautiful, like a facelift. This is to do with our body. But as far as our soul, our spirit, our mind is concerned, we can go and learn more philosophy, more science to have more knowledge, or we can go and study religion. We go and study with this master, then we go to that master. And we also make it look as if we have virtue, that we love others. As far as physical appearance is concerned, we can adorn ourselves, with cosmetics, make ourselves look beautiful. And as far as our mind, our



spirit is concerned we can also find cosmetics to adorn our mind, because we want people when they look at us to see us as something good and beautiful and true. And we deceive each other.

In this world, on this earth we are deceiving each other. Deep down we feel there is nothing good, beautiful and true in us. But on the other hand, we are trying to show people all the time the good, beautiful, and true that we are. And so we deceive ourselves from generation to generation. And when we are deceiving others, we are also being deceived by others. We are each other's victims. We are all deceiving each other, we are all trying to make ourselves up so we will look less ugly, and at the same time others are doing the same.

Sitting at the foot of the bodhi tree on the night when he realized the truth, the Buddha discovered something, which is very surprising to him and to us. He saw that the good, the beautiful and the true are to be found in everyone. But very few people know that. People think that the true, the beautiful, and the good exist somewhere else it is in someone else. They do not know that in the deep levels of themselves there is the true, the beautiful, and the good. And because we are not able to be in touch with these things, the good, the beautiful, and the true, in ourselves, we have the feeling that we lack something, that we are a saucepan without a lid. And the whole of our life we are looking for someone else to replace that lack. How strange, all living beings have the fully awakened nature, but none of them know it. And because of that they drift and sink from lifetime to lifetime in the great ocean of samsara, in suffering. And that is what the Buddha said the moment when he realized the path.

And so when we are able to recognize that in us there is the essence of the good, the beautiful and the true, we will be able to stop going in search. We will stop feeling that we lack something and we will stop running around in the world, in the universe looking for something. The truth is that we return to ourselves in order to be in touch with the good, beautiful and true that are in us. And at the moment we are in touch with those things, we are able to stop wandering around feeling we lack something. And we are able to stop deceiving others. We don't have to adorn ourselves, make ourselves up anymore, because we have discovered the true, the beautiful, and the good right here within us.

Like a wave on the ocean. It feels that it is fragile, that it is ugly; the other waves are more beautiful, more high, with more value. It has an inferiority complex, the complex that it's not worth anything. But when this wave is able to be in touch with its true nature, which is the water, it sees that water goes beyond all concepts of beautiful, ugly, high, low, here and there. Whether it's a large wave or a small wave, half a wave or a third of a wave, it is still made out of water. Once it knows that it is water, it has a very strong faith that it has absolute value because water is without birth and without death. A wave is really only water, and as far as water is concerned, all waves are equal because all waves are water. So everyone who lives in this world-- women, men, rich, poor, intellectual, those who have been disabled, those whose body is in good health-- they all have this basis of good, beautiful and true. Just as the small wave, the big wave, the high wave, the low wave, all waves are equal, wholly equal as far as water is concerned, as far as their true nature is concerned.

[Bell]

When we are looking for someone to love and we find that person, we are very happy because we feel we have found our lid, the lid of our saucepan. We are happy because we think that the person we have discovered has the true, the good and the beautiful in them. There is a song: "You are as gentle as a nun..." But it's not so sure that a nun is gentle. When you have lived with that person for a short time, you see that that person is quite fierce, not gentle at all, and not beautiful and not wholesome like you thought before. And then we no longer have faith in our lid. We say the other person is deceiving us, they have deceived us into thinking they are good, beautiful, and true. But we have already written the contract and we are caught with that person, and we have a lot of irritation, and we have a feeling that we have been deceived. And it is very painful for us to have to live with that person. We want to divorce them and go and live with somebody else. And we feel like that our whole life. We never feel we have found the good, the beautiful and the true in the other. Because everyone wants to adorn themselves with good, beautiful and true in order to show others that we have those things, which the other is looking for. But we don't really believe ourselves that we have those things, and that is where our suffering starts from. We don't have faith that we have the things we are showing others we have. And we are looking for those things in another, and then we feel we've been deceived just as we deceive others. And so we fall into the same situation, the one who looks and the one who is looked for. After we have failed many times, we have felt tired of this person; we feel they don't

Then we go and look for a religious teacher. And when we find a religious teacher, we kneel before him, and we feel we have found our real lid. But there are many religious teachers who are fake, many religious teachers who do not have faith in the goodness, truth and beauty in themselves but try to show others that they have beauty, goodness and truth. So there are disciples, students, who after a time of learning with that teacher, discover he hasn't got the things they were looking for in him. There's not something really beautiful, something really true, something really good in that person. So we abandon that teacher and we go and look for another one. And if we continue like that, we are constantly throughout our life looking for someone.

Then one day we meet a very special religious teacher. And that religious teacher says, "Don't go looking anymore, don't go seeking anymore, don't keep looking outside of you anymore, because within you the thing you are looking for is already there." And that teacher is our root teacher. Our root teacher tells us: "All living beings have the pure, clear, complete nature within themselves." And everyone has to return to themselves in order to be in touch properly with that beautiful, good and true which is within them. And when you have been in touch with it, you will put an end to your going in search and there will be a steady faith that you have happiness, you have peace. And this searching, which has been going on for so many lifetimes will come to an end.

The World Honored One is a religious teacher who doesn't want us to be slaves the whole of our life. He doesn't want people to just lean on him. So the Buddha is a special teacher. He says that: "You have what you are looking for within yourself." So a real religious teacher, someone who is worthy of being called a religious teacher, is a teacher who has the capacity to show us that in our own nature there is a teacher we can return to and take refuge in. And we don't have to look for this teacher outside of ourselves. And that is a teaching, which is very basic to Buddhism. That the beautiful, the wholesome, and the absolute good are present in ourselves, and we only need to return and be in touch with them. You need to have faith in the basic goodness, the basic beauty, and the basic truth, which is in you. You have to go back to yourself and discover that. It is your own ground of being. It is your basis.

When we look at the person we love, we need to begin to look with these eyes. We look at the person sitting in front of us, and we say: "This person has the basic goodness, the basic truth, and the basic beauty, but that person doesn't believe in those things, and that person is using cosmetics to adorn themselves for us." And we are the same. We do not believe in the good, beautiful and true, which is in us, but we are putting on cosmetics to adorn ourselves for the other person. And when we can do that, then real love begins to arise in us. We say to the other, "Let's not live in this narrow way anymore. Let's both return to our own basis. Let's not deceive each other anymore." We don't need to deceive each other because the thing we are looking for is already there in us, and we have to become friends on the path of the practice. And that path of practice is not to lead us on an outer search but to lead us on an inner search.

Ánanda was the cousin of the Buddha. One day he was going on the alms round. He stopped at a well because he was thirsty in order to ask for some water. Sitting by the well was a young woman called Matanga. She belonged to the pariah class, the untouchable caste. The higher castes were not able to touch her or come near to her on the path because she would pollute them. When the higher castes are going on the road and they see an untouchable, they have to keep out of their way so as not to be polluted. And when Ánanda asked for water, she said, "No, I can't give it to you because I am an untouchable and it will pollute you." And Ánanda said, "In our teaching, there is not a caste division and the Buddha has told us that we are all equal, and therefore you can give me water, I won't be polluted, so don't be afraid." Matanga was very happy. She lifted the water with a ladle and gave it to him to drink. He joined his palms and thanked her and went home. But after that Matanga started to fall in love with him. She couldn't sleep, she couldn't eat, because she kept seeing Ánanda, how beautiful, how good, how kind he was. Matanga was very beautiful. Her father had passed away she lived with her mother. And when her mother saw she couldn't sleep or eat for many weeks, she asked why. The girl wept and said because she is always thinking about Ánanda. And because the mother loved her daughter very much, she did her best to help her daughter. So they decided together to invite Ánanda to come and to make offerings to him. And one day they met Ánanda as he was going on the alms round, and they invited him to come to them so they could make offerings. And when he came into the house, they gave him a bowl of tea. But that tea was made of a kind of herb, which would take away our clarity when we drank it. And if we lack our clarity, we can do things we don't want to do. When Ánanda had drunk this tea, he felt he had made a mistake and he didn't know how he was going to put it right. When he saw what had happened, he knew that he had to practice. So he didn't say anything, he didn't do anything. He sat in the cross-legged position, and he began to follow the practice of following his breathing, because he knew he was in a very dangerous position. And the Buddha was in the Jeta Grove and wondered why Ánanda had not returned. So he

ordered two other monks to go and look for Ánanda. And the other two monks were able to find Ánanda sitting in meditation in the house of Matanga. They led him back to the Jeta Grove Monastery. And they saw Matanga weeping so they also brought her back to the monastery. When Ánanda came back to the monastery the effect of the tea was already wearing off, and he prostrated to the Buddha, and he thanked the Buddha for sending the two monks to send him back because it could have been very dangerous if they hadn't. And then Matanga came in, and the Buddha asked Matanga to sit down. And he said, "Do you love Ánanda so much?" And Matanga said, "Yes, I love him very much." And Buddha said, "What do you love in Ánanda? Do you love his eyes or his nose?" "I love his eyes, I love his nose, I love his ears, I love his mouth, I love everything. Everything to do with Ánanda, I love. I think I cannot live if I don't have Ánanda." She was a very beautiful girl although she belonged to the untouchable caste. She was quite naive too; she was about 18 or 19 years old. The Buddha said, "There are many things in Ánanda which you have not seen and which you would love even more if you could see them." And she said, "What?" And Buddha smiled and said, "Like Ánanda's love, like Ánanda's bodhicitta. All you've seen is eyes, nose, ears, mouth. As a young man, he has given up his life in a wealthy family in order to become a monk, with the aim of helping many people. Ánanda could never be happy with one or two people because that happiness is so small. That is why he became a monk. He wants to be able to help many, many people. He has a mind of great equality. He wants to love, but not love one person. He wants to love thousands and thousands of people. And that bodhicitta of Ánanda is very beautiful; if only you could see it you would love Ánanda even more. And once you had seen that you wouldn't want to make Ánanda your own anymore. You would respect Ánanda, and you would do everything you could to help Ánanda realize his deep aspiration as a monk, to help him realize the bodhicitta. Ánanda is like a cool breeze in the air, and if you love that cool breeze in the air and you want to put it into a small box and put the lid on and turn the key, then you will not have that cool breeze in the air anymore. Ánanda is like a cloud floating in the sky, the blue sky, very beautiful. If you want to catch that cloud and put it in a box and turn the key, then you will kill Ánanda, because you have only seen the things about Ánanda, which are not the most beautiful things. You have not seen the most beautiful things about Ánanda. If you were to see them you would love him more, and you would love him in a way, which would help him be Ánanda, just as you can help a cloud be a cloud floating in the beautiful blue sky. Don't think that Ánanda is the only one who has that beautiful aspiration. You are the same. You have that beauty too. You can also live like Ánanda if you really love Ánanda and you are able to see the bodhicitta of Ánanda. You will be able to return to yourself and see you have the bodhicitta in yourself, and you can vow to Ánanda that you will live in such a way not just to make one person happy but to make many people happy."

When Matanga heard that, she was very surprised. She said, "I don't have any worth. I belong to the lowest caste. I cannot make anybody happy." He said, "Yes, you have already done it. You already have that beautiful, good and true in yourself. Everyone has that. And if we return, and we are able to be in touch with that basic goodness, truth and beauty in ourselves we will have faith in it, and we will know that we can make happiness for many people." And when she heard that, she said, "Is that really so? Can I really do the same as Ánanda? Can I really leave the family life, become a nun and help thousands of people like Ánanda?" And the Buddha said, "Yes, why not? If you can be in touch with the true, good and beautiful in you, and you give rise to the bodhicitta you will be like Ánanda, you will be able to do like Ánanda and bring happiness to many people." Her insight was opened by the Buddha, and she touched the earth before the Buddha, and she asked to become a nun under a Bhiksunis so that she could do like Ánanda, so that her love could open up and become wide, become measureless. From then on Matanga was accepted into the Bhiksunis Sangha which was led by Maha Gautami.

And that is Buddha's method. In the first place people are infatuated by an image, which they say is beautiful, and they want to be a possessor of that image, and they suffer because of that. But afterwards they wake up and they see that this is deceptive, and they put away that image and they look for another object. And then they wander the whole of their life, from lifetime to lifetime, not able to find the real object of their love. The Buddha showed people that when we are able to come across someone who has a steady faith in their own goodness, beauty and truth, we can look at that person as a mirror in order to return to ourselves and be in touch with the basic goodness, beauty and truth in ourselves. And then we will be happy; we will be able to put an end to our wandering. And like the other person, we can become someone who loves all species, not the one object of love of one person. And we become someone who serves others. We become an associate lover with the other. The Buddha is someone who loves all species and his action is the action of love. That is all he does in his life, and he rescues beings all his life. And when we see the beauty of the Buddha, the goodness of the Buddha, the truth of the Buddha, when we hear the Buddha say that you also have that goodness, beauty, and truth and if you can go back to yourself, you will find it, then you can become an associate of mine and together we will use our love to help others suffer less.

Love is not a matter of two people loving each other but a matter of collective love. When we enter the monk-hood or nun-hood, it is because we want to love others. And the object of our love, of course, is ourselves and is all species. That is why we have the expression "associate lovers." Buddha is someone who loves, and the Buddha's love is so great, so beautiful we want to take part in that love. We want to be a participator in that love. And the Buddha says, "Yes, why can't you participate in that love? Why don't we become lovers together?" And we take the hand of the Buddha, like teacher and disciple, and we love each other but we love all species, so we and the Buddha are associate lovers. When we are participators in the Sangha, we are associate lovers. We protect ourselves, we protect each other, we give faith to each other, and we bring to others our transformation and their transformation when they are in touch with us.

In the time of the Buddha, there was a monk whose name was Vaikali. After Vaikali became a monk, he became very attached to the Buddha, but his love was narrow, just superficial. He saw the Buddha as something like a realm of light. When he sat near the Buddha, he felt very happy, and that's all he wanted. He didn't really listen deeply or carefully to the dharma talks. He just spent his time looking at the Buddha, gazing at the Buddha. He felt so peaceful, so happy, so content sitting by the Buddha. But he could only see the small beauty of the Buddha. He didn't see the great wisdom, the great love of the Buddha. And after a time, when the Buddha had been looking at him, the Buddha saw that this disciple was still very weak. Wherever he was, he just wanted to be with the Buddha. Wherever he sat, he just wanted to sit near the Buddha. He was attached to the Buddha, but he was just attached to the shadow of the Buddha, not to the real, deep level of the Buddha. Then the Buddha decided he wouldn't allow Vaikali to be near him anymore. If he was going to the Jeta Monastery, he wouldn't allow Vaikali to go with him. And he did not allow him to be his attendant, he said, "Now another monk will be my attendant." So he felt the Buddha had thrown him off, that the Buddha didn't love him. And when he had been refused by the Buddha, he felt like committing suicide. The Buddha knew that this was happening so he tried to find a way to save him. And when he was about to commit suicide, the Buddha came and said, "What are you doing?" And he gave teachings to Vaikali. And that is when he learned that his love was not the deep love of a monk but a superficial attachment. After that, he practiced properly. The Buddha showed him that in his own self, deep down, there was the beautiful, the good and true, and he should be looking for that instead of running out after an image of good, beautiful and true outside of him. The Buddha said he always did that himself and he taught others to do that. A good religious teacher is someone who can show us that in our own self we have a religious teacher, and we have to take refuge in that religious teacher in ourselves and we should not be attached to a religious teacher outside of us. Because that religious teacher outside of us may not be true, may be a fake. And if he is a true teacher he will always encourage us to go back to ourselves, to be in touch with the true teacher within ourselves. The best teacher is the teacher who can help you to see that there is a real teacher within yourself. We take refuge in that teacher within ourselves, and then we will never be disappointed. If a wave has faith in its nature of water, then the wave will never be disappointed. When we read: "I go back and take refuge in the Buddha in myself, and I vow that all beings may be in touch with the awakened nature and quickly realize the love which is called bodhicitta" -that love in which teacher and disciple are working together, are serving together, are associate lovers- this shows us our path, those two lines of the sutra show us the path.

The real object of our love is not outside of us, the real object of our love is ourselves. We have to know how to love ourselves, know how to return to our true nature, to see the wholesome, the good, the true and the beautiful within us. Then we will be able to see that in others. When we have seen real beauty, goodness, and truth in ourselves and others, we will no longer be deceived by the outer adornments. When we see the people in the world are deceiving each other, we feel compassion and we pray that one day they may wake up and find the object of their search within themselves. And when we have found that object of our search in ourselves, we will help others, and we will stop our wandering from one lifetime to another.

We can begin by looking deeply at inter-being. The thing, which we say is beautiful, may not be beautiful, but we think it is beautiful. The thing that we say is true maybe it is not true, but we have thought it is true. The thing, which we say is wholesome, is kind may not be true kindness, but we think it is true kindness. Therefore, we should use the looking deeply of the Buddha and see that the true goodness contains the true beauty and the true truth. That is inter-being. When we see that, we will discover quickly that the object we thought was beautiful is not really beautiful because it does not contain goodness and truth. And once we know it is a fake, it will not appear beautiful to us anymore. Truth is always beautiful. Kindness is always beautiful. And beauty is always true, is always kind. When we love someone we have the duty to look at that person in such a way that our look is not caught in wrong perceptions, perverted perceptions, so that we can see the real beauty, the real truth, the real goodness of that person

and not be deceived by the outer form. We should be able to see that the other is basically beautiful, basically good and true and does not need to disguise themselves with artificial means. So please, you don't need to deceive yourself and deceive me anymore with outer adornments. I am also like that. I have the basic goodness, truth and beauty, so I don't need to adorn myself to deceive people anymore. Let us be associate lovers in order to be in touch with the beauty, goodness, and truth within ourselves, and we will be able to help ourselves and help numberless other people. That is the path of the Buddha. Whether we are a monk or a nun or not a monk or a nun, we have to see this and we have to stop deceiving ourselves and deceiving others and allowing others to deceive us. So we must stop deceiving others and allowing others to deceive us. It is because we don't know that we have the good, the beautiful and true in us that we feel we lack something. When we feel we lack something, we feel we're just a half, we are isolated, we need to find our other half. When we have seen that the thing we are looking for is within us, the feeling of isolation will end and we will begin to feel happy, that is the great awakening. And once we are awakened like that we will understand what the Buddha meant when he said on the day he realized awakening, "How strange, all living beings have the basic nature of awakening, of happiness, of truth, but they don't know it." And because of that, from lifetime to lifetime, they continue drifting and sinking on the ocean of birth and death.

[Bell]

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# Healing is Possible Through Resting

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Good morning, my dear friends.

Welcome to the third week of our summer opening. Today is the thirtieth of July 1997, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We have been practicing pebble meditation during the past two weeks, and I hope that the children who just arrived yesterday and today will continue with our practice of the six pebbles. There are children who have been here for the last two weeks, and they will show you how to practice pebble meditation. You'll have to make a small bag like this, and find six pebbles like this, little pebbles. Wash them very carefully, dry them, and put them into the bag.

Today we will learn a short poem together, young people and also less young people. We are going to use the pebbles to practice the poem also. It would be wonderful if you can memorize the short poem in order to practice. Many of you know it by heart already, but there may be a few of you who have not been introduced to the practice of this poem: "In, out. Deep, slow. Calm, ease. Smile, release. Present moment, wonderful moment." I guess most of us can sing it already. Shall we sing?

In, out.

Deep, slow.

Calm, ease.

Smile, release.

Present moment,

Wonderful moment.

This is a wonderful poem, because every time you practice it you'll feel much better within your body and your mind. When you are angry, when you are worried, when you suffer, if you know how to practice that poem then you will feel much better right away after one or two minutes.

I am going to remind you of the way to practice. First, "in" and "out." It means that when I breathe in, I know I am breathing in. It's easy. And when I breathe out, I know I am breathing out. I don't mix the two things up. Breathing in, I know it is my in-breath. Breathing out, I know this is my out-breath. By that time, you stop all the thinking, you just pay attention to your in-breath and your out-breath. You are 100 percent with your in-breath and your out-breath.

It is like holding a baby in such a way that you hold it with 100 percent of yourself. Suppose this is a baby and I hold the baby like this. I hold the baby with 100 percent of myself. Remember, there are times

times when your mother holds you like this. Have you seen the image of the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus? She holds him like that: 100 percent. So here, our in-breath is our baby, and we hold our in-breath 100 percent. "Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in." You just embrace your in-breath, nothing else. Don't think of anything else. That is the secret of success.

When you breathe in, you just breathe in, you do nothing else. Do you think you can do that? I am asking the adults also, do you think you can do that? Just embrace your in-breath with 100 percent of yourself – mind and body together. And when you breathe out, you embrace your out-breath. You identify your in-breath as your in-breath, because when I hold my baby I know this is my baby, not something else. So, "in, out" means, "breathing in I know this is my in-breath, breathing out, I know this is my out-breath." It's very simple, but it's wonderful. I am sure that if you try it, after two or three in-breaths and out-breaths you will feel much better already. I can guarantee it because I have done it and I always feel wonderful.

If you are about to cry, if you are about to kick or hit someone else because of your anger, and if you know how to go back to yourself and practice "in, out" for three times, I am sure that you'll be different. You will not cry, you will not kick, you will not punch because you are a much better person after the practice of "in, out." Today, try and you'll see the power of the practice.

Then after you have practiced "In, out" three, four, or five times, you'll feel that your in-breath has become deeper and your out-breath becomes slower. Because when you are angry, when you are in despair, when you suffer, your in-breath and out-breath are very short and not calm at all. But then after having breathed in and out peacefully, your in-breath will be very smooth. Your out-breath, also. So the quality of your breathing has been improved. Your in-breath is deeper and calmer, your out-breath is also deeper and calmer. That is why we can practice "deep and slow."

Breathing in, I know that my in-breath has become deeper, and the deeper it is, the more pleasant it becomes. Try to practice breathing in for a few times and you'll see that it is deeper. And when it is deeper, you'll feel a lot of pleasure. When you breath out, you say, "Breathing out, I know my out-breath has become slower, slower, more peaceful." If your breath is deeper, you are deeper. If your breath is slower, you are slower. It means you are more peaceful. So, breathing in, I know that my breath has become deeper. Breathing out, I know that my breathing has become slower. It's wonderful.

You might use your pebbles also. If you are practicing sitting meditation, you put the pebbles on your left, you bow to the pebbles, and you pick up a pebble with two fingers. One pebble. You look at it and you put it in the palm of your left hand and you begin to practice breathing in, breathing out. "In, out." The practice is smooth. "In, out." Once more. "In, out." You'll feel much better. Then, I use my two fingers to take the pebble up and I put it on my right side. I have practiced "In, out" already.

Now, I'd like to practice, "Deep, slow." So, I take another pebble. I look at it. I put it in my left hand and I begin to practice. "Deep, slow." It has become deeper by itself, you don't have to make it deeper. It has become deeper by itself alone because you have practiced already three times "In, out." That is why your breath becomes deeper naturally, and slower. Let us practice together "Deep, slow" three times. "Deep, slow" [pause for three breaths]. Good, we have finished with "Deep, slow. We pick up the pebble and put it on our right side.

Now we practice the third line, "Calm, ease." It means, "Breathing in, I feel calm. Breathing out, I feel I take everything at ease." This exercise is very wonderful to practice, especially when you are nervous, when you are angry, when you don't feel peaceful in yourself. Quick, quick! You have to go back to your in-breath and out-breath and practice "Calm, ease."

This is an exercise given by the Buddha himself in a sutra called *Anapanasati Sutra, The Sutra on Mindful Breathing*. "Breathing in, I calm the mental formations in me. Breathing out, I let go." I let go of my anger. I calm my anger, I calm my worries, I calm my jealousy. And I let go of my anger, I let go of my jealousy. I think that adults have to practice together with the children. Every time the child is angry then her mother or her father should take her hand and invite her to practice. "Calm, ease." "Let us, together, practice calming and easing. 'Breathing in, I calm myself. Breathing out, I let go'" at least three times and

together, practice calming and easing. 'Breathing in, I calm myself. Breathing out, I let go' at least three times and you will feel much better.

You can begin right away with "Calm, ease" or you might begin in a classical way with "In, out" first and then "Deep, slow" and then "Calm, ease." Either way is good. The Buddha dharma is wonderful. The moment you take the dharma up and practice you begin to feel better right away. And as you continue the practice, your quality of being always continues to improve.

I propose to you to practice three times 'Calm, ease' but no one prevents you from practicing more than that: four times, five times, six times, if you like it. I think you will like it because it makes you suffer less. And if you can practice eight times, ten times, you'll feel much better. "Calm, ease."

Then you'll come to the fourth pebble, and that is "Smile, release. Smile, release." "Breathing in, I smile." You can smile now. You may feel it is very difficult to smile, too difficult to smile. But after having practiced three or four times you feel that you are able to smile. And if you can smile, you'll feel a lot better. You may protest, "Thay, I have no joy in me, why do you want me to smile? That's not natural." Many people ask me like that, not only children, but grownup people. They protest, "Thay, I have no joy in me. I cannot force myself to smile, it would not be true, it would not be natural."

I always say that a smile can be a practice, a kind of yoga practice. Yoga of the mouth: you just smile even if you don't feel joy and you'll see after you smile that you'll feel differently. Sometimes the mind takes the initiative and sometimes you have to allow the body to take the initiative.

Sometimes the spirit leads, and sometimes the body can lead. This is why when you have joy, you naturally smile. But sometimes you can allow the smile to go first. You try to smile and suddenly you feel that you don't suffer that much any more. So don't discriminate against the body. The body also can be a leader, not only the spirit. I propose that you try this when you wake up during the night. It's totally dark. Breathe in and smile, and you'll see. Smile to life. You are alive, you smile. This is not a diplomatic smile, because no one sees you smiling. Yet the smile is a smile of enlightenment, of joy – the joy you feel of being alive.

So smiling is a practice, a yoga practice. Don't say, "I have no joy, why do I have to smile?" Because when you have joy and you smile, that is not practice, that's very natural. When you don't have joy and you smile, that is a real practice. You know there are something like 300 muscles, small and big on your face. Every time we get very angry or worried all these muscles are very tight. When people look at you with that tension on your face, they don't see you like a flower. People are afraid of you when all the muscles on your face are tense like that. You look more like a bomb than a flower. But if you know how to smile, in just one second, all these muscles are relaxed and your face looks like a flower again. It's wonderful.

So we have to learn to smile and then we'll look presentable right away. Look into the mirror and practice, and you'll see that the practice of the smile is very important. It brings relaxation and you can let go. You feel that you are released from the grip of the anger, of the despair.

[Bell]

On my right, there are already four pebbles. Now I'd like to practice the fifth pebble. This is the most wonderful practice. The fifth pebble can bring you a lot of joy, a lot of enlightenment, a lot of delight. That is "Present moment, wonderful moment. Present moment, wonderful moment."

This is a very deep teaching of the Buddha. The Buddha said that it is possible to live happily right here and right now. We don't have to go to the future. We don't have to go elsewhere to be happy. We can be happy right here and right now. You don't need more conditions to be happy, you have enough conditions to be happy right here and right now. If we know how to be ourselves and to look inside and around ourselves, we see that we have had enough conditions to be happy. That is the practice of living happily in the present moment.

When you breathe in, you feel that you are alive. Life is available to you, now: the blue sky, the white



When you breathe in, you feel that you are alive. Life is available to you, now: the blue sky, the white cloud, the green vegetation, the birds singing. Plum Village is here. Many friends are here. Your daddy is still alive, your mommy is with you, your brother is there, your sister is there. You have strong feet. You can run. You have eyes that can help you to see everything. There are many conditions for your happiness, you don't need anything else, you can be happy right away. You stop running. That is the practice. Because there are people who run all of their lives; they run because they think that happiness is not possible in the here and the now.

So this is a wonderful teaching of the Buddha. You breath in and you say "Present moment." It means, "I establish myself in the present moment. I don't run any more." This is the practice of *samata*, stopping. Stop running. I am wonderful like this in my sitting position or my walking position or even in my lying down position. It's wonderful like that I don't need to run any more. Stopping. Present moment, wonderful moment. It's wonderful that you are alive.

To be alive, that is a miracle. Imagine a person who is already dead. You might not have seen a dead person but maybe you have seen a dead bird, a dead animal. No matter what you do, the animal cannot come back to life. Whatever you do, whatever you say, the animal is not able to listen, to hear. A dead person is also like that. She lies on the bed and no matter what you do, you cannot revive her. You cannot bring her into life again. You cry, you beat your chest, you pull your hair. But that person is already dead.

So, when you look at yourself, you see you are still alive. You see the person you love is still alive. That is wonderful. You have to wake up to that fact. The teaching of the Buddha is the teaching of waking up, waking up to see that all these wonderful things are still available. So you stop running, you establish yourself in the present moment. "Breathing in, I am in the here and in the now. Present moment. Breathing out, I feel this is a wonderful, wonderful moment."

The Buddha said life is available only in the present moment. The past is gone, the future is not yet here, you have only one moment to be alive. That is the present moment. So simple and so deep. You have an appointment with life. You should not miss that appointment. Life is most precious. You've got to meet her, you've got to be with her. And you know something, life is only available in the here and the now, in the present moment. So don't miss your appointment with life. Don't miss the present moment. That is why the fifth practice is wonderful. If you practice like that, you get a lot of joy whether you are on your cushion or on your bed or in the position of walking meditation. "Present moment, wonderful moment."

Now I would like to ask you to sing and I will practice. I practice for you. I will practice breathing in and out and I enjoy for you. Okay.

[The community sings: "In, out. Deep, slow. Calm, ease. Smile, release. Present moment, wonderful moment."]

I think by now, everyone knows the gatha by heart. I would like to tell you that this gatha is also good for practicing walking meditation. We shall do walking meditation after the talk and you may like to walk peacefully and happily with this poem. You breathe in and you make two steps. You say, 'In, in.' Then you breath out and you make another two steps, "Out, out." That is walking meditation. You don't do anything else. Your mind and your body are totally for the breathing in, the breathing out, and the making of steps. You are perfectly concentrated in walking and breathing, you are not concerned with other things. And you can continue with "In, out" like that for a few minutes. If you want to walk a little bit quicker, you can make three steps while breathing in and breathing out.

You do it very naturally, in such a way that you get a lot of pleasure. Don't be so serious, so solemn. You do it very, very, very naturally. "In, in, out, out." If you enjoy walking, you feel wonderful. You are doing the practice correctly. After some time, you switch into 'Deep, slow.' "Deep, deep, slow, slow. Deep, deep, slow, slow." Very concentrated. And we shall be walking with you. Everyone is concentrated. Everyone is peaceful. Everyone is joyful. The energy of joy and of peace will radiate from each person, and if we walk in the Sangha like that, we will receive the collective energy and it will be very, very strong.

There is still one pebble left. But for this gatha we don't need all six pebbles, we need only five. After you

will be very, very strong.

There is still one pebble left. But for this gatha we don't need all six pebbles, we need only five. After you have practiced five gathas, your sitting meditation is done. So you hear the sound of the bell, you collect your pebble, and you put it in your small bag.

Do you think my small bag is beautiful? I like this color very much. If you want to have your bag in yellow or orange, you are welcome. Make a very beautiful pebble bag for your meditation because you are going to practice using it here. And when you go home you'll continue to use your pebble meditation bag. If the adults want to imitate, they are welcome. It's wonderful. There are those of us who have rosaries — 108 — and the use of the rosary is exactly like the use of the pebbles. But I think this way is fun.

So, please, young people, I think today you have a lot of things to do. Do them joyfully. I hope the children who have been here for one or two weeks will transmit the teaching of the pebble meditation to the newer children and then we will practice together. Now, when you hear the bell, please stand up and bow to the Sangha before you go out and continue the practice.

[Bell]

I would like to give a little bit more instruction about [conscious breathing]. Don't try to breathe in. Don't make any effort of breathing in. It is very important. Allow yourself to breathe in naturally. You breathe in any way, why do you have to make a determination to breathe in? That is the point. Allow yourself to breathe in normally. Only pay attention to your in-breath. Don't say, "My in-breath, come here, I will tell you how to do it." No. You allow yourself to breathe in, that's all. Short or long, you allow it to be the way it is. Be completely non-violent while holding your baby. Don't force your baby to be like this or to be like that, allow it to be as it is. Embrace it only with your mindfulness. It is very important.

When you love someone, you allow him to be or allow her to be. Don't say, "If you don't do this, I will not love you." This is already the practice of love. Allow your in-breath to be itself. Just embrace it with the energy of mindfulness. "Breathing in, I am aware that I am breathing in." That's all. The impact will be great.

Many people practice like they are in a hard labor camp. You force yourself, you make too much effort, and you tire yourself out after some time. If you know how to allow yourself to rest, to allow your in-breath and your out-breath to flow in and out naturally, you will never get tired. You only need to light up your mindfulness and to be aware of it. Like when you turn on the light, you just turn on the light. And because of the light you are aware that the bell is there, your friend is there. Awareness is like that. So you recognize your in-breath as an in-breath, your out-breath as your out-breath, and you embrace them with love.

Then in no time at all, their quality of being will be improved. Like a suffering baby who is kicking, is crying, is vibrating. You don't say, "Now, stop, don't cry, don't be agitated!" You don't say this. You don't do anything; you don't intervene. You don't force it to be the way you want. Just pick up the baby and embrace it with all your being. When you have the energy of tenderness, of love and of care, that energy will naturally penetrate into the baby and there will be a transformation. Many of you have been a mother or a father and you know this. Just hold the baby with your tenderness, with your whole presence. And that whole presence, body and mind concentrated we call mindfulness (and you are capable of being mindful, you know). So you cultivate your mindfulness so that you will be mindful more, to be there for your suffering, for yourself, for your beloved one.

In sitting meditation you do like that also. Don't struggle in order to sit. Allow yourself to sit in a relaxed way. "Smile, release." Remember, there was a time when you'd sit in your living room watching television? You could sit for one hour, even two hours? And you didn't complain that you had pain in your shoulders or arms. You just allow yourself to sit. Sitting meditation is not a struggle. If you take it to be a struggle, you'll be tired. After fifteen minutes you'll feel pain in your shoulders and in your head. So, allow yourself to rest. When you practice sitting meditation, walking meditation, allow yourself to rest. It is possible to rest while practicing walking meditation, sitting meditation, mindful breathing. In

in your head. So, allow yourself to rest. When you practice sitting meditation, walking meditation, allow yourself to rest. It is possible to rest while practicing walking meditation, sitting meditation, mindful breathing. In fact, this practice I offer to you as a means of resting.

Many of us take vacations. But during the time of the vacation we don't know how to rest. Then after the vacation, we are more tired. So, we now allow ourselves to rest our body and our spirit. Here, we are learning the art of resting. Meditation as the practice of resting.

Our body has the capacity of healing itself. You know that. When you get a cut in your finger, do you have to do anything? No. You only have to keep it clean and in a few days it will be healed. Your body has a number of problems within because you have not allowed it to rest. If you know the art of total relaxation, the art of allowing your body to rest, most of these troubles will go away after a few weeks.

When an animal is wounded in the woods, it knows how to do this. It seeks a peaceful corner in the forest and it lays down for several days. Several generations of ancestors have transmitted to them the wisdom that this is the only way to restore themselves. They don't have doctors, they don't have pharmacists, but they know how to rest. They don't need to run after their prey, they don't need to eat—in fact, they fast during these three, four, five days of resting. And one day the animal is healed and it stands up and it goes to look for a source of food.

We don't know how to do like animals. In order to get well quickly we bring a lot of interventions into our body: we take a lot of drugs; we undergo a lot of treatments. But we don't know how to allow our body to rest. So learning how to allow your body to rest is a very important practice. Love your body. You learn total relaxation and you can do it several times a day. Five minutes is enough, ten minutes. Even three minutes are already very good if you know how to allow your body to rest completely.

And for your spirit, it is the same. Our consciousness is able to heal itself. It has the power of self healing but you don't allow it to rest. You continue to feed your consciousness with your anger, your worries, your thinking, and so on. You don't believe in your consciousness. You are seeking for a means to heal it but you don't know how to allow yourself to rest. You keep thinking the whole day and you keep worrying the whole day. You never allow yourself to rest. If you know how to practice total relaxation, you'll know how to smile and how to send your smile to different parts of your body. During that time, you have stopped thinking and worrying because you are focused on your body, your breathing, your walking. When you practice mindful breathing, when you practice "In, out, deep, slow," not only can you nourish yourself—body and spirit—but you can also stop your thinking. Stopping the thinking, stopping the worries, is very important.

Our mind is like a cassette tape turning nonstop day and night. We have a habit. You are not there, because you are carried away by your thinking, by your worries. You may get lost in the past, regretting the past or being caught in the suffering that you endured during the past. You suffered in the past already but now you want to suffer more by recalling the past. You call your past back in order for you to suffer more. Why do you have to show it several times, your suffering? Cows, when they eat grass, they swallow and then they bring it up again and swallow for a second time. Many of us do the same. We have suffered already in the past. But we want to bring our suffering back to the present moment and suffer more. We like that.

The future is not yet there but we think of it and we worry, and we become scared. We are not capable of dwelling in the present moment where life is. Life and its many wonders are available inside of you and around you and yet you are not able to touch its wonders because you get lost in the past, in the future, and also in your projects, your worries. How can your mind rest and restore itself? Our mind also has the capacity of self healing just as our body.

Remember when you lost someone very dear, you suffered, and you thought that you'd never restore yourself, you'd never be able to forget that suffering. You thought that the suffering would dwell with you, the wound would be with you, forever. But some time later you got used to it and you were able to go on with life. This means that your mind, your spirit, was able to heal itself.

We have to trust our spirit in the way we trust our body. Our spirit has the power of self healing if only we know how to allow it to rest and don't continue to feed it with more worries, with more projects, with more fear. The practice of mindful breathing, mindful walking, enjoying the contemplation of the sky, of the vegetation, of being with friends, enjoying things in the present moment, helps you to stop these kinds of feelings – the heart and the spirit filling with worries and fear. You will heal in the inside.

During the time you are here in Plum Village, you are surrounded by many friends who are practicing resting, recuperating themselves. Do a lot of total relaxation, mindful relaxing, walking, and sitting meditation, and enjoying doing things mindfully to help the Sangha.

[Bell]

Many of us have had the good fortune of having a loving father, a loving mother, a loving teacher, or a loving brother or sister or friend. We have to call on them for help. Whether they are still alive or they have passed away, they are always there in you.

A father always wants to love his child. That is the deepest nature of a father. If you see that your father does not love you, it is because he was not able to manifest his love, that's all. No one had helped him to express his love. All fathers, deep inside, want to love their child. But if they say, "I hate you! I don't recognize you as my child!" that is because they do not know how to do it. It does not mean that a father does not love his child. You also, you love your children even if your children do things you consider to be negative, that irritate you. Still, deep inside you, the love you have for your children is still intact. You only need to learn how to express your love. There are many people who think that their father or their mother doesn't love them, many are victims of such a vision. But, according to my experience, all fathers love their children, deeply. All mothers, also. Even animals, they love their children.

When you look into your hand – if you look deeply – you'll see that this hand of yours is also the hand of your mother and your father. Because you are a continuation of him, you are a continuation of her. This hand has been transmitted to you by your mother, by your father. It is also the hand of your ancestors. So, don't think that this is only your hand. This is the hand of several generations. And you are going to transmit this to your children and their children.

All your wisdom, all the wisdom, all the experience, all the suffering, all the happiness of all the generations of your ancestors are here in your hand. Our ancestors, their wisdom, their happiness, their sorrow, their hope, their fear are there inside you. They all have been transmitted to you. In every cell of your body you find everything: all the hope, all the fear, all the happiness, all the suffering of all the ancestors are in each cell of you. Now mankind is capable of cloning itself. We need only to take one cell, any cell of our body, and we can duplicate ourselves.

This means that in each cell there is the presence of you as a whole. The one is the all, that is the teaching of the Buddha in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. And in each cell of our body there is hell, there is the Pure Land. There is the Buddha, there is Mara, there is Jesus, there is Satan, there is happiness, there is sorrow, in just one cell. All our ancestors can be touched, can be found in one cell, because one cell contains everything. And this is not just an abstract idea. You have heard of the technique of cloning. We know that one cell can manifest as the whole thing. So look in your own hand, and you'll see that the cells in your hand are also the cells of your father, your mother, your ancestors. Many of them were wise, were happy. Call on these elements within yourself to come and help you and rescue you.

You have blood ancestors and you also have spiritual ancestors in yourself. If I only have blood ancestors, I cannot be myself, as I am now. Now I use my eyes in such a way that my ancestors did not. I have learned the Buddha's way of looking. I look at things with mindfulness. I look at things and touch the nature of inter-being in them. The way I look at the sky, at a pebble, as a person, is very deep. And without the Buddha, my teacher, I could not look like that. The way I breathe, the way I walk, also. My feet, walking, are also the feet of the Buddha. I am walking with the Buddha's feet. Not only do I walk with my mothers feet and my fathers feet, but also I walk with the feet of the Buddha, because each step I can generate joy and peace.

because each step I can generate joy and peace.

You have your beloved father in you. You have your beloved mother in you. You have your beloved teacher in you. Your teacher may be Jesus, your teacher may be Buddha, and, according to your practice, your teacher is more or less evident, powerful, in you.

Suppose you have a painful spot on your body. Why don't you call on your father, your mother, your ancestors, to come and help? Touch that painful spot with the energy of healing, of love. Because you know that deeply in him, your father loves you, deeply in her, your mother loves you, deeply in him, your teacher loves you and wants you well.

Suppose you have a tumor that might become important and the doctors say that the only way is to open you up and take it and throw it out. That is our tendency. If there is something that we don't want, we tend to cut it out and to throw it away: surgery. We have created the painful things in our body and we don't want them any more, we want to throw them out. It is the same with your mind, your consciousness. There are tumors in your consciousness, the tumor of hate, of despair, of depression. And we also want to cut and throw it out.

That is a way of life, a habit of thinking that we have learned from this new society. If you don't want anything, you eliminate it either by using a gun or a knife. We have to look deeply into our civilization and to see in what direction we are going. When we have something painful in us, we don't know how to take good care of it. We don't know how to embrace it the way we embrace our child. We want to take it, to throw it out. We want to punish it.

So, breathe in deeply, and see that this hand is the hand of your father, your loving father, or your loving mother or your loving teacher. Even if she is no longer alive, she still is real in you because every cell in you is also her. Every cell in you is also him. Call on them to help. There are healthy cells in you, and the healthy cells will come to rescue the cells that are not so healthy. Because you do not know how to take care of them, some of them are tired and are being transformed into a problem.

So breathe in and bring your father, your mother, and your loving teacher back into your hand. You call the name of your father; the name of your teacher and suddenly your hand becomes the hand of your mother, your teacher. And then, when you breath out, touch the painful spot. Breathe slowly. Transmit all these energies to the painful spot. And after you finish, do it again. Breathe in, call his name, and you make him alive, you make her alive. The energy of your father or your teacher will be present in your hand. And when you breathe out you smile, and the energy of your father or your teacher will penetrate into you. Practice like this every day, whether in a sitting position or in a laying down position.

In the moment of your practice you are totally relaxed. You have faith in the people who love you, who want to wish you well. Then you make them present in the form of energy and you use that energy to touch and heal. Your hand has a healing power. You don't need someone else. Every one of us has a healing power within himself or herself, an energy you can generate into the palm of your hand. That energy is stored within each cell of your body. Learn to do it with your body. If you have a liver that does not work so well, that is suffering, concentrate yourself, inviting your father, your mother.

I have no doubt that my father always loved me. And I don't consider my father as nonexistent, because my father is in every cell in me. When I call on him, he is back in every cell in my body. When I generate that energy called the energy of a loving father, I touch myself and say, "Father, please help" And your father will be transmitting to you this energy. During that time you feel peaceful, knowing you are being loved, being taken care of by your father.

Remember when you were a small child, you had a fever and your tongue was so bitter you didn't want to eat anything? And your front felt like it was burning and when your mother came, she put her hand on your forehead, and suddenly you felt like you were in paradise. Just one hand. You felt much better with the presence of your mother and just one hand. Don't think that hand is no longer there. It is still there because your hand is the continuation of your mother's hand. And if you call on her, "Mommy? Please help," when you breath in and then, when you put your hand on your forehead and you breath

is still there because your hand is the continuation of your mother's hand. And if you call on her, "Mommy? Please help," when you breath in and then, when you put your hand on your forehead and you breath out, you will receive exactly the same energy. Nothing is lost.

Take care of your body in such a way. Allow your body to rest in whatever position you are. And later you will be able to take care of your spirit, your ailing spirit, in the same way. You have blocks of pain, of sorrow, of fear, of despair within yourself. You have to embrace these blocks of pain and sorrow exactly in the same way. Call on them to help.

The Buddha-to-be is not something abstract. The Buddha is very deep in me because I have learned the practice. I have learned to look in the way the Buddha looked. I have learned to breathe the way the Buddha breathed. I have learned to walk in the way the Buddha walked. On the Gridhrakuta Mountain where the Buddha stayed more than twenty years, I sat there and I contemplated the very sunset that he had contemplated. I was looking with my eyes and his eyes at the beautiful sunset.

You also are capable of looking with your Buddha eyes. In your daily life you are used to looking with your eyes, the eyes that do not have the energy of mindfulness and concentration behind them. But with your mindful breathing, you can generate the Buddha eyes in you. When you use these eyes to look, you will see things much differently. It is like having a pair of binoculars and if you bring them up to your eyes, you can see differently. So, you have the Buddha eyes transmitted to you by your teacher. Why don't you use them? Just breathing in, breathing out, generates the energy of mindfulness and suddenly, you have the Buddha eyes. Looking with the Buddha eyes, you will not get angry. You will despair.

You should not have any complex. The Buddha is enough, Jesus is enough. Jesus said so, "I am in the father, the father is in me, I am in you, and you are in me." Very clear. You can't deny that teaching in the heart of Christianity.

So, if the Buddha is in you, why don't you call on him for help? You just breathe in and breathe out and Buddha will be alive, you can use Buddha eyes, Buddha hands. "Dear Buddha, please help," and suddenly you have the hand of the Buddha available to you. How simple. What else do you practice? What else do you learn? This is very simple, easy to understand, and yet very deep. The healing that you want, you can provide by yourself. You are supported by the Sangha, by the Dharma, by the Buddha, every moment of your daily life. If only you know this, you will realize that support is always available and then you will not feel alone and scared.

So today, in the Dharma discussion, please discuss this practice. Allow us to rest. Allow our body to rest. There are techniques of resting. You may not be used to them but they are good habits to learn. We have learned the other kind of habit of not resting, and now we have to learn a positive habit to be able to rest – bodily and mentally. And we have to share with each other the ways we do this to arrive at a relaxed state of the body and of the mind.

Walking is a way of resting, sitting is a way of resting, eating is a way of resting. Don't struggle. We have struggled all our lives; we have gone nowhere at all. Stop the struggle and take care of our body, our mind. Practice resting and restoring ourselves and we'll go very far.

We will get together and discuss this. We will share our experience of the practice of resting. There are brothers and sisters who have been in the practice longer, they can share their practice. You may ask questions. And we practice the first day, the second day, and then we'll meet again and share again our practice. If you have any difficulties, if you have any questions, or if you have some success, some joy in your practice, please share these with other people.

We practice as a Sangha. There are dharma teachers available in our midst, there are also brothers and sisters who are familiar with the teaching and the practice. So do profit from their presence.

And when you feel concentrated and mindful, and you enjoy your practice of walking, of breathing, of smiling, then you'll contribute a lot to the Sangha. Because if we see you relaxed, walking mindfully, smiling, breathing mindfully, we will be reminded to do the same. Together, we'll produce that collective

smiling, breathing mindfully, we will be reminded to do the same. Together, we'll produce that collective energy that will nourish us. When we go home, we can continue the practice even with our children. Because the children in Plum Village proved that they are capable of the practice.

**Dear Friends,**

**These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.**

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# The Island of Self; The Three Dharma Seals

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Dear Sangha, good morning. Today is the 28<sup>th</sup> of July 1998, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We are going to speak English today.

When I was a small boy, at the age of seven or eight, I happened to see a drawing of the Buddha on the cover of a Buddhist magazine. The Buddha was sitting on the grass, very peacefully, very beautifully, and I was very impressed. The artist must have had a lot of peace within himself, so that when he drew the Buddha, the Buddha was so peaceful. Looking at the drawing of the Buddha made me happy, because around me people were not very calm, or very happy. When I saw the drawing of the Buddha I was very impressed, and I suddenly had the idea that I wanted to become someone like him, someone who could sit very still and peacefully. I think that was the moment that I first wanted to become a monk, but I did not know that. I wanted to be like the Buddha.

You know that the Buddha is not a god, the Buddha was just a human being like all of us, and he suffered very much as a teenager. He saw the suffering in his kingdom, he saw how his father King Shuddhodana was trying hard to make the suffering less, but he seemed to be helpless. So the political way did not seem to him to be a very effective one. As a teenager the young Siddhartha was trying to find a way out of the situation of suffering. He was always searching and searching for the way. I think that today many young people also do as the young Siddhartha did: you look around yourselves, you don't see anything really beautiful, really good, and really true, so you are confused. You are searching, looking very hard to see whether there is something really beautiful, really good or really true to embrace and follow.

I was very young, and yet I did have that kind of feeling in me. That is why, when I saw the drawing of the Buddha, I was so happy. I just wanted to be like him. And I was told that if you practice well, you can be like a Buddha. The Buddha is not a god; the Buddha is just a human being like us. Anyone that is peaceful, loving and understanding can be called a Buddha. There were many Buddhas in the past, there are Buddhas in the present moment, and there will be many Buddhas in the future. Buddha is not the name of someone; Buddha is just a common name, to designate someone who has a high degree of peace, who has a high degree of understanding and compassion.

When I was about eleven, I went for a picnic on the mountain of Na Son, together with several hundred boys and girls from my school. I was very excited about that picnic, because I learned that we were going to climb the mountain Na Son, and on the top was a monk, who lived there as a hermit and practiced in order to become a Buddha. I had had picnics before, but this one was so special, because I knew that if I climbed to the top of the mountain I would see the hermit, see someone who was practicing in order to become like a Buddha. So that was my secret hope, to be able to meet with the hermit. A hermit is someone who practices alone, who does not want to be disturbed, and who wants to devote all of his time to the practice.

At that time I did not know anything about the practice of mindful breathing, or mindful walking; I did not know what walking meditation was. We organized in teams of five boys, and we brought with us a few bottles of boiled water, and rice balls. We squeezed cooked rice into the shape of bread, and it was so compact that you could cut the rice into slices, and you would eat your rice with sesame seeds, crushed roast peanuts, and a little bit of salt. I think



that in Plum Village you'll have to organize that kind of picnic some day--just a slice of rice, eaten with sesame seeds—it's very delicious. Since I did not know how to practice walking meditation, we tried to climb as quickly as possible. We got very tired. We had hardly come halfway up the mountain before we were exhausted, and the worse thing was that we had drunk all our water. We got very thirsty. So we tried our best, and when we had climbed to the top, we were completely exhausted, and thirsty; and we were given the order to prepare our picnic.

I did not care a lot about eating. I wanted to go and look for the hermit. But it was very disappointing—someone told me that the hermit was not there. Imagine my disappointment! A hermit is someone who wants to be alone in his hut. Imagine...he learned that three or four hundred children were coming! So he must have gone somewhere and hidden himself. I believed that the hermit was still somewhere there in the woods, and that if I ventured into the woods I might have a chance to see him and talk to him. So I left my friends, my *copains*, there, and I went alone into the forest. The forest was large, and there was not much chance of meeting someone who wanted to hide himself in it.

A few minutes after I went into the forest, I began to hear the sound of dripping water. The sound was so clear, so nice--like the sound of a piano. It was so interesting that I tried to go in the direction of the sound. Very soon after that I discovered a very beautiful natural well, made of blocks of stone. The water was very high, and when I saw the water, so clear, so refreshing, I was so happy, because I was extremely thirsty. To see the water was something wonderful. So I came close to the well, I looked down, and I could see every detail at the bottom of the well. The water was so limpid. I used my hand to cup the water and I drank it. It was so delicious; I cannot describe to you how delicious it was. I had never drunk anything like that. Believe me, it was much better than Coca-Cola, even Coca-Cola with ice.

After having drunk the water from the well, I felt completely satisfied. At that time I could not describe my feeling, but now I think I can describe my feeling: it was the feeling of being completely satisfied, when you don't have any more desire, even the desire to meet the hermit. Very strange—why? Because in that moment, as a small boy, I believed that the hermit had transformed himself into a well so that I could meet him privately, in a kind of private audience with the hermit. You know, I had been reading a lot of fairy tales, so I really believed that the hermit had transformed himself into a well so that I could meet him personally. So I felt very privileged; I felt that I was the only one who could have that wonderful opportunity of meeting the hermit. Then I sat very close to the stones, and I lay down and looked at the sky. The sky was very blue. I remember also seeing a few leaves of a branch that was close by, hanging across the sky. Just a minute later, I fell into a very deep sleep.

I don't know how long I slept, but the sleep must have been very deep, because when I woke up I did not know where I was. I had to look around to realize that I was on the top of the Na Son Mountain. The space was so special, the circumstances so special: I alone was allowed into that space to have that wonderful encounter with the hermit in the form of a well. I did not want to leave the well. I wanted to stay up there, but I remembered that my friends must have been waiting for me. I had just suddenly disappeared, and that could have made them very worried. So I had to leave the natural well with a lot of regret. On my way down, suddenly a sentence came to my head, not in Vietnamese, but in French: "I have tasted the most wonderful water in the world." That water may symbolize a kind of spiritual experience.

When I arrived, my friends asked me where I had been. I did not say anything—I did not tell them anything. I don't know why. It seems that I wanted to keep the event as something sacred; I did not want to share. I had the impression that if I told them about that, I would lose something. That is why I was not talkative at all, that afternoon. You know, my first experience with a Buddha was seeing the drawing on the cover of a Buddhist magazine, of someone sitting on the grass, very peacefully. My second encounter with the Buddha was when I was on the top of the Mountain Na-Son, and drinking the water from that natural well. Later on, when I was twelve, I made the determination that I would ask permission of my mother and father to become a monk, and I kept that secret for many years. It was when I was about sixteen that I formally made a request, and it was very fortunate that my parents agreed.

I have told you that Siddhartha, before he became a Buddha, had already suffered a lot as a young man, a teenager. He was looking very hard to see a path by which he could bring happiness to himself and to many people around him, a path which could help him to transform and to reduce the amount of suffering that he could see in himself

(Bell)

I know that the young people must be confused from time to time. I understand them. I know that by looking around they may not see something beautiful, something really true or good to follow. Your feeling is like the feeling of Siddhartha Gautama before he became the Buddha. That kind of search is legitimate. It is very hard to be there when you don't really see something truly beautiful, truly good. So many young people in our time do not know what to do with their lives, just because they don't see any meaning to their lives. That is why they live in a way that can destroy them, both physically and mentally. I would like to invite the young people to inquire about the Buddha as a young man, as someone who was searching for some meaning for his life. The Buddha practiced, got insight, and with that insight and compassion he spent forty-five years helping the people of his time, and after his passing away he continued to serve. Many people today consider themselves to be the students of the Buddha, practicing in a way that makes it possible for understanding and compassion to be born in their hearts. When you have understanding and compassion in your heart, your life has a meaning. You can relate to all living beings around you, and you know that you can do something; you can be something, that can help relieve the suffering around you.

Yesterday I got a request from a magazine in North America. I don't know if you know of the magazine called *Self*. That is a magazine for young women in the United States. Arnie says that the circulation of that magazine is very large: every month they print 1,100,000 copies. They wanted me to write something about freedom. They asked, "Thay, do you think that genuine freedom is possible when suffering is still going on around you? Is it possible to be truly free when so much suffering is going on around you?" I wrote about ten lines, and I said that suffering is part of life, and suffering has a role to play in life, because it is only against the background of suffering that we can identify happiness and well being. If we have not suffered, we have no chance to experience happiness and well-being. So suffering is something that can help us to identify happiness and well-being. To believe in a place where there is only happiness, where there is no suffering at all--to me this is very naïve. Even if it is truly happiness, without suffering there is no means to identify it as happiness. If you have never been hungry, then you cannot experience the joy of having something to eat. If you have not been away from your beloved one, missing him or her a lot, you cannot recognize the joy of being close to that person. That is why happiness and suffering "inter-are."

Also I said that most of the suffering that exists is due to the fact that we are so ignorant. Most of the suffering that we endure comes from our craving, our anger, our hate, our discrimination, and our delusions. If you can get rid of these afflictions in yourself, you can remove a lot of suffering, in yourself and around you. If you practice the teaching of your spiritual tradition, you will be able to develop understanding and compassion within you, and the amount of freedom you enjoy can be measured by the amount of understanding and compassion you have in your heart. If you have more understanding and compassion, then your freedom will be greater. With understanding and compassion in you, you can always help to relieve the suffering around you. Because of that, you are no longer afraid of suffering. You do not allow yourself to be drowned in the ocean of suffering; you do not allow suffering to overwhelm you, because you already know how to transform the suffering within you and around you. You are even capable of smiling at your own sufferings, and the suffering around you, because that smile proves that you have confidence in your capacity to transform it. That smile is born from your awareness that suffering is there, but you can be something, you can do something, in order to remove the suffering around you every day, every hour. That is why freedom is possible. I insist that the amount of freedom you enjoy can be measured by the amount of understanding and compassion that you have in your heart.

I would like to tell the young people that there are ways to live your life so that you can bring more understanding and compassion into your heart. Understanding and compassion are something truly beautiful. If you look deeply into yourself and around you, you will see that the seed of understanding and compassion is in everyone, and if we know the practice, the way of mindful living, then we will be able to generate the energy of understanding and compassion in ourselves. We can recognize what is beautiful, what is true, what is good, in us and around us, and our lives suddenly have a meaning. You are there in order to help, to help relieve the suffering and to bring joy to our daily life. If you have a purpose, a meaning to your life, you will know how to protect yourself, how to protect your body, to protect your mind from the destruction that is going on around you. Your life, your body, and your consciousness will become an instrument for peace, for compassion, and when you protect yourself, when you protect your body and your mind, you help protect all of us. You protect your children, you protect your ancestors, and that is why I would like to tell the young people today that the roots of goodness, the roots of beauty, the roots of truth are within us. If we know how to practice mindful living, then we can touch these wonderful factors in us,

can help reduce the suffering in the world every day.

I have met my hermit in the form of a well. You may have met your hermit also, but you might not have recognized it. Your hermit may have been in the form of a tree, a rock, or a person. I think the moment when we meet the hermit of our life we are transformed, we know where to go. That was my case--when I met my hermit, I knew where I had to go. That is why I asked my parents to allow me to become a monk. Becoming a monk is just one way; there are many other ways that are equally beautiful. So I wish that every one of you here would be able to meet your hermit very soon. And you must be very attentive in order not to miss him, because you might meet him, and yet not recognize him. The hermit can appear to you at any time. But if you are mindful, if you are attentive, when your hermit appears, you will be able to recognize him at once. It would be a joy for me if, someday when you meet the hermit, you will write me a letter, saying "Thay, today I have met my hermit, and I'm very happy, I know where to go now." Don't forget to do that. When you hear the small bell, you may stand up, and bow to the Sangha before leaving the meditation hall.

(Bell)

The Buddha said that every one of us has an island within, an island of peace and stability within, and we should practice so that we can profit from the existence of that island within ourselves. When he was eighty, the Buddha knew that he was going to pass away in a few months, and he knew that his disciples were going to miss him. During the last six months, around the city of Vaisali, he used to talk to the monks and the nuns about taking refuge within yourself. The expression is *atadipa*. *Ata* means self, *dipa* means island. When you go back to that island, you experience peace and stability. The Buddha is there, the Dharma is there, and the Sangha is there.

We can describe the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha as forms of energy. Mindfulness is the kind of energy that helps us to be really there in the present moment, body and mind united. Mindfulness is the kind of energy that helps us to touch life deeply in the present moment. Buddha is my mindfulness, shining near, shining far. So when you have the energy of mindfulness in yourself, the Buddha is present, and light is there. With mindfulness you can see the situation more clearly, and you know exactly what to do and what not to do. We know that the practice of mindful breathing can maintain your mindfulness alive as long as you wish. Or the practice of walking meditation can also maintain mindfulness alive as long as you wish. So you might like to keep the Buddha with you, to invite him to stay with you as long as you like, by the practice of mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful sitting. Because that is an energy for your protection. Buddha is not an abstract idea Buddha is something very real. Your Buddha nature is your capacity of being mindful, calm and concentrated. So you have confidence in the Buddha, because you know that you are capable of generating the energy of mindfulness in you. What makes a Buddha a Buddha is the energy of mindfulness. Mindfulness carries within itself the energy of calm concentration, and if mindfulness is there for some time, insight is born. That is why mindfulness, concentration and insight go together. So, in your island you have the Buddha. Visualize a beautiful island within yourself, with beautiful trees, clear streams of water, birds, all your ancestors, spiritual or blood, and you can encounter the Buddha, you can take the hand of the Buddha and walk on that island. It is possible. When you are mindful you are a Buddha at the same time. Taking the hand of the Buddha and walking is something you can do every day.

Be an island unto yourself. "As an island unto myself, Buddha is my mindfulness, shining near, shining far. Dharma is my breathing, guarding body and mind." The Dharma is there in the island, and I can deeply touch the Dharma inside of me. The Dharma not as a talk, not as a book, but the living Dharma; because when you practice mindful breathing, you are generating the living Dharma, the Dharma that does not need words. When you are practicing mindfulness of breathing or walking, you yourself become the living Dharma. When we see you, we see the Dharma. And if you teach, you don't teach with your mouth, you teach with your body, your breath, your steps. So the living Dharma is something real, not something abstract. You can afford to have the Dharma anytime you want, available twenty-four hours a day, if you care to touch it. Dharma is my breathing, protecting body and mind. Because mindful breathing helps mindfulness to stay alive. The energy of mindfulness is an energy of protection. We know that the energy of mindfulness generated by ourselves can protect us, but the mindfulness generated by a Sangha...

Imagine one thousand, two thousand, three thousand people, practicing walking meditation and enjoying every step they make. A lot of energy is born from that kind of collective practice. I usually organize a day of mindfulness in a practice center called Spirit Rock in northern California, and we usually have 2500 or 3000 people doing walking

happen to be in that crowd, and if you open yourself for that energy to penetrate into you, you can get healing, you can get transformation. That is why the energy of mindfulness, whether individual or collective, is the Buddha protecting you. We should practice in order to touch the Buddha and the Dharma several times a day, in our daily lives. The Sangha is also available. First of all the five elements within us--form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness, the five Skandhas--may be in disharmony with each other when you don't practice. Illnesses, disease, are born when the five elements are in contradiction, in disharmony. But when you begin to practice mindfulness of breathing, the energy of mindfulness generated from the practice of mindful breathing begins to reorganize the Five Elements. The Five Elements begin to come together and operate in harmony, and that is a Sangha, the Sangha within. Sangha means harmony, a community living in harmony. So we look into our person, and we recognize the five elements of our person. The physical aspect is form, and then there are the feelings, the perceptions, the mental formations and the consciousnesses. Under the supervision and the guidance of mindful breathing the Five Elements begin to come together and operate in harmony. Your territory begins to be surveyed by mindfulness, and you know how to restore peace and harmony within your kingdom of the Five Elements. The Sangha is inside, it is not only around you, but it is inside. Therefore, when you go back to the island of self with mindfulness, you have a wonderful refuge. In difficult moments, you should be able to dwell in security in that kind of island. Make it available, learn to enjoy and to make use of that island within yourself. That is the recommendation made by Buddha when he was eighty.

Suppose there is a storm raging—you don't mind, because your house is solid. You close all the doors and windows, and although the wind is blowing fiercely outside, and there is rain and thunder, you still feel safe within your home. The island of self is like that. You have to practice, to learn, in order to allow that shelter, that island within yourself to appear for your use. During your daily life, learn to dwell in that safe island of mindfulness within you. Then you will be protected from provocations, you will be protected from anger, and from despair. There are many elements around you that are ready to invade you, to attack you and to deprive you of your peace and stability. So you have to organize in order to protect yourself, and to build up the practice of dwelling in that island of self is the practice recommended by the Buddha.

In the position of sitting, of walking, while you are doing the cooking, of the washing, please learn to dwell in that island of self, and feel safe when you do these things. When you need to go out of the house you can still carry that island of self with you, and everywhere you go you will feel safe, because you have a safe island to protect you. Nothing can assail you anymore, because you have that island of self, available every moment. During your sleep that island is also available. Before going to sleep, you can go back to that island and feel comfortable there. No one can remove that island of safety from you. They can steal your money, they can steal your car, but they can never steal that safe island within yourself. It is possible to tell the young people to practice this same way. They are very vulnerable when they go out into society, and if they don't have a refuge inside, it is very easy for them to get into despair. Please practice taking refuge in the island of self, and help the young people to do the same.

Every time you have a strong emotion, like anger or despair, it is as though you are exposed to a storm. Look at the tree outside the window. She is trying her best to stand in the storm. When you look at the top of the tree, you see that several small branches and leaves are swaying back and forward very violently in the wind, and you have the feeling that they could be broken at any time. We feel very much the same when we are exposed to the storm of emotions. We feel that we may die because the emotion is so strong—the fear, the despair, the anger, the unhappiness—but if you look down a little, you see that the trunk of the tree is firmly rooted in the soil, and then you have another impression. You know that the tree is going to stand in the storm. We are like trees also. On this level we are very vulnerable. So during the storms of emotion, if you dwell on this level, the level of the brain, the level of the heart, you might be broken, you might feel that you are not going to be able to stand it, you are going to die. But bring your attention, down, down, to the navel, a little bit below the navel, and pay attention to the rising and falling of your stomach, practicing mindful breathing. When you breathe in your stomach will rise, and when you breathe out, your stomach will fall. To stop all the thinking, to just focus all your attention on the rise and fall of your stomach, and to dwell there at the root of your tree, and not to float up here at the level of the heart or the brain, is a very important practice. If you can do that for ten minutes, or fifteen minutes, the emotion will go away and you survive the storm. And if you can survive the storm once, you have confidence. The next time that depression comes, when a strong emotion comes, you will do the same. And that confidence is very important in you.

We should know that we are more, much more than our emotions. An emotion is something that comes, stays for

many young people, when they are overwhelmed by their emotions, have the feeling that they cannot stand it, and the only way to stop the suffering is to go and kill themselves. That is why the number of young people who commit suicide in our times is so high: they don't know how to handle their emotions. It's not very difficult – to be aware that the emotion is just an emotion. It is born, it stays for some time, and it will go away. Why do you have to die because of it? You are much more than your emotions.

If you know how to practice taking good care of your tree during a storm, you will be all right. If you continue to think, to imagine, and if you give yourself up to the feeling, you will be blown away. You need to know how to go down to your roots and concentrate all your mind into mindful breathing and into the rise and fall of your abdomen. The best position is the sitting position, because in that position you are more solid. I am sure that after about a dozen, or twenty minutes, your emotion will go away, and you will have proved that you are stronger than your emotion. But please don't wait until a strong emotion comes in order to practice, because by that time you will have forgotten the practice. So, please try right now, every day, and spend a number of minutes practicing that way. After some time, perhaps twenty-one days, you will have the habit, and if an emotion comes you will remember to practice. If you have overcome once, you will have a tremendous confidence in your capacity of dealing with the emotions. You have to be capable of doing that, and show it to the young people, that is it is okay to have an emotion, and that we can take care of our emotions. We can teach the young people to do it, even if they are still very young: "Darling, you sit with Mommy. I will hold your hand. Let us not think of anything; let us pay attention to our bellies. Breathing in, it is rising; breathing out, it is falling." And you can use your mindfulness to support your child, and both you and your child can practice together. She will develop confidence also, because after that the crisis will go away, and she will have faith in the practice. Try your best to put into practice the teaching of the Buddha, going back to the island of self, enjoying the island of self. Then when you feel agitated, when you feel insecure, when you feel unstable, just follow your in-breath and out-breath, and come back to that island of self, and you'll feel all right. These practices are not complicated—just the good habit of doing that and you have your refuge.

In Buddhism we speak of taking refuge in the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. But to me, taking refuge is not a matter of belief. It is a matter of practice. Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are not abstract things, things that exist only in the cloud. Buddha is the energy of mindfulness that you do have, even if it's not sufficient yet; you know that if you continue the practice you will cultivate more of it for your protection. Dharma...you know that you can transform yourself into living Dharma if you know how to live your daily life mindfully, the art of mindful living. And Sangha...you know you can coordinate, you can restore harmony between different elements within yourself, and between you and other members of the community. So Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are very concrete, you can touch them with your finger, or with your feet. The island of safety is made of these elements, and to practice like that is to practice protecting yourself and protecting your beloved ones. If you are safe, then you can help another person to be safe. Remember when the plane is about to take off: the flight attendant always reminds you that if it should happen that there is not enough oxygen to breathe, oxygen masks will be available and you should put on your oxygen mask first, before helping your child. This is the same thing. You have to make the island of self available to yourself first, and then you can help the people in your family, your beloved one, to enjoy the same practice.

(Bell)

In our midst there is a lady who has cancer. She has been coming to Plum Village every year and practicing, and every time she gets back the quality of her blood is always much better than if she had stayed in her own country. It is a pity that she cannot stay here, because I know that to be here, practicing with a Sangha and living a simple life, would help her very much with her health. She wrote to me, "Thay, I am very grateful for the practice, for the Dharma, for the teaching. I see its value, its effectiveness. I want to live I don't want to die. I am still very young." I think this is partly the question of the environment. Our society is organized in such a way that we live our daily lives without a lot of peace and stability, and there is a lot of stress. So the question of changing the environment, whether to go somewhere else, or whether to work together with other friends to transform the environment where we find it, is very important. Bring more elements of the Pure Land into your place. Maybe elements of your Pure Land are hidden somewhere there, somewhere very close to you. Discover them, and make them available in your immediate surroundings. With some practice of looking deeply, we might effect some changes in our environment, so that the place will be safer to live, and healing can take place more easily. This is the problem of Sangha building. That is why, during all of the retreats that we offer in Europe and North America, we always urge people

All of us want to live we don't want to die. But the question of living and dying is a deep question within Buddhism, and the practice of looking deeply can show us that it's not possible for us to die, because our true nature is the nature of no-birth and no-death. Birth and death are just two aspects of the same reality. Without dying, birth cannot take place. We know that many of the cells in our body die every day. If they didn't die, how could life be possible? How could the new cells be born? So birth and death help each other to be possible. If we had to mourn and cry and organize funerals every time a cell died in our bodies, we would not have time left to do anything else.

When you come to a Buddhist practice center, you might learn ways to relieve some of your suffering, such as fear, despair, anger, agitation, and so on. You may learn ways to improve your relationship with the other person, but the greatest relief you get is by touching your own nature, your true nature of no-birth and no-death, and that is the ultimate purpose of Buddhist meditation. We know that meditation means to stop, to be there, to be calmer, to be more concentrated, so that you can look deeply into what is there in the here and the now. You can see deeply into the true nature of reality. The insight you get will liberate you from your fear, your suffering. Looking deeply is the phrase we use to translate *vipashyana*, translated sometimes as "insight meditation." You practice into order to get insight into the true nature of reality. That practice can be described simply as the practice of looking deeply. But how to look deeply? Do you have to use your thinking? Or do you have to refrain from thinking in order to really practice looking deeply?

You have to touch your nature to know who you truly are. In the beginning we have talked about the wave, and the water. We know that a wave can live her life as a wave, but she can also live her life as water at the same time. It would be a pity if a wave did not know that she is water. To be a wave is wonderful, but to be a non-wave is also wonderful. I have asked the children to draw a wave, and after that to draw water for me. Water can be a wave, but water can be a non-wave, and water can be very, very still, to the point that she can reflect the blue sky and the clouds and the trees perfectly. We can enjoy being a wave, but we can enjoy just being still water. Where can we find that stillness? Does it exist in the wave? Yes, because you cannot take the wave out of the water, and therefore, touching the wave deeply, you touch the water in within it, and you know that if you can touch the water, you can touch the capacity of being still. No one denies the fact that water can be still. So the capacity of being still, the capacity of reflecting things as they are, you know that is in the water. The Buddha nature, the capacity of understanding, of loving, of being non-fear, of being liberated, we have it deep within ourselves. So once we have touched that true nature within ourselves, we can transcend all kinds of fear. We know that being a wave is wonderful, but being a non-wave is also beautiful.

I want to live, yes that is the truth, but who forbids you to live? If you don't live in this form, then you will live in another form. When the time comes for the cloud to become rain, if the cloud is wise, the cloud will not be upset, or be scared, because the cloud know that being a cloud floating in the sky is wonderful, but being the rain falling on the ocean, on the mountain, on the field, is also wonderful. When you have touched that nature of no-birth and no-death in you, you can remove your fear, you can remove your anguish, your suffering. The ultimate purpose of Buddhist meditation is to touch your true nature of no-birth and no-death. That true nature is sometimes called *nirvana*.

Nirvana means extinction. Extinction of what? Extinction of notions such as being and non-being, birth and death, one and many. We have created all these notions that become the ground of all our suffering and our fear. Because we have not been able to touch the true nature of our being, we are caught by these pairs of opposites. To die, what does it mean? In our minds it means that you are someone, and then suddenly you become no one. You are something; suddenly you become nothing—that is our idea of death. But if we observe things deeply, we see nothing like that in reality. There is nothing that can be reduced to nothing, or to nothingness. Can you reduce a cloud into nothingness? No, you can only help the cloud to become rain. You can help the rain to become snow. But you cannot make a cloud into nothingness. A sheet of paper—can you reduce it into nothingness? No. You may burn it, and it is transformed in many ways. Part of it will become a cloud, the smoke rising. Part of it will become the heat, penetrating into the cosmos. Part of it will become ash that can be reborn as a flower or a blade of grass, sometime later. So everything is on their way, on their journey of manifestation of being. You are also like that. If you don't manifest yourself in this form, then you manifest yourself in another form. Please don't be afraid of being nothing. Nothingness is just an idea. Non-being is just an idea. The Buddha said not only is non-being an idea, but being is also an idea. Reality transcends both being and non-being.

When conditions are sufficient, something manifests itself, and you describe it as being. But when the conditions

not sufficient, and it has not manifested, you describe it as non-being. That is wrong. It's like when you look into space, into the air. You don't see any color, you don't hear any sound, you don't see anything, but if you have a radio or a television set, you will capture radio or television programs, and sights and sounds will manifest themselves. So the radio or the television set is just one more condition enabling you to see the signals manifest. Signals are reaching us all the time, signals from satellites, and because we lack one condition, we believe that they do not exist, but they do exist. So our notion of being is also a notion. And our notion of non-being is another notion. Reality transcends both being and non-being. That is the teaching of the Buddha in so many, many discourses. The typical sentence is like this: when conditions are sufficient, your body manifests, and you say that the body "is". And when conditions are not longer sufficient, and your body does not manifest itself, then you say that there is no body. Your idea of "there is" and "there is not" are just ideas. Your true nature is free from these two ideas: being and non-being. That is why, within the teachings of the Buddha, to be or not to be, that is not the question. The Buddha helps us to practice stopping, concentrating, calming, in order to be able to direct our looking deeply into the heart of things, to discover the true nature of reality, the nature of no birth, no death, no being, no non-being, no coming, no going. If you come to a practice center, and you don't learn anything about that practice, it would be a pity.

The Buddha offered us a teaching called the teaching about the Three Dharma Seals. A seal is something that you use to certify that something is authentic it is not a fake. So every teaching that does not bear the mark of the Three Dharma Seals cannot be described as an authentic Buddhist teaching. I would like to tell you something about this teaching today, because some of you have to leave tomorrow.

Impermanence, *Anitya*, is the first Dharma Seal. Any teaching that does not bear the mark of impermanence is not a Buddhist teaching. What does impermanence mean in the context of the Buddha's teaching? Impermanence means that everything is changing all the time. Nothing can remain the same in two consecutive moment--you also. The "you" of this minute is no longer the "you" of a minute ago. So you are not identical to yourself in two consecutive moments. Intellectually, we understand that, but practically, we don't behave as if we have seen that truth. When you live with someone close to you, you might practice impermanence, because impermanence should not be a theory, it should be a practice, an insight. You dwell in the concentration of impermanence when you know that you are impermanent, and so is the person who lives with you. You don't know what will happen to you tomorrow, or what will happen to her tomorrow. That is why you cherish this present moment as the most important moment, and you know that everything you can do to make her happy today, you do it, without waiting until tomorrow. Many of us live in such a way that it seems as if the other person is going to be there for one million years, and she will remain the same for ever and ever. That is ignorance that is the absence of the insight of impermanence. So the insight of impermanence helps you to be aware that if there are things you can do today to make him happy, you should do them right away. This present moment is a wonderful moment when you can feel life as something real. You don't wait until tomorrow in order to live your life, because you know that this moment is a very special moment. It is available, and you are able to recognize it as the only moment when you are able to live deeply. So you touch life deeply in that moment, because you have the insight of impermanence. You cherish the presence of the person you love in this very moment, because she is available only in the here and the now.

Impermanence is not something pessimistic, because impermanence is the very ground of life. If things were not impermanent, life would not be possible. If things were not impermanent, your daughter could not grow up, she would remain like that for ever. If things were not impermanent, the dictatorial regime would remain like that forever. If things were not impermanent, the grain of corn that you sowed yesterday would remain a grain of corn for the whole year. It is because of impermanence that life is possible. If things are impermanent, it is possible for you to transform your pain and your suffering. So impermanence is good. You suffer not because things are impermanent, you suffer because things are impermanent but you believe them to be permanent. That is why the insight on impermanence helps you not to suffer too much. Impermanence is an insight, a concentration, a *samádhi*. You can dwell in the insight of impermanence, and you will become a very wise person. So if impermanence is a *samádhi*, a concentration, an insight, you should not deal with it as a theory. You have to live with it. One who keeps the insight of impermanence alive within himself can avoid making a lot of mistakes and can bring a lot of happiness to the people who live around him.

(Bell)

What is non-self, *Anattá* (Pali)? It means impermanence. If things are impermanent, they don't remain the same

is only a stream of being. There is always a lot of input and output. The input and the output happen in every second, and we should learn how to look at life as streams of being, and not as separate entities. This is a very profound teaching of the Buddha. For instance, looking into a flower, you can see that the flower is made of many elements that we can call non-flower elements. When you touch the flower, you touch the cloud. You cannot remove the cloud from the flower, because if you could remove the cloud from the flower, the flower would collapse right away. You don't have to be a poet in order to see a cloud floating in the flower, but you know very well that without the clouds there would be no rain and no water for the flower to grow. So cloud is part of flower, and if you send the element cloud back to the sky, there will be no flower. Cloud is a non-flower element. And the sunshine...you can touch the sunshine here. If you send back the element sunshine, the flower will vanish. And sunshine is another non-flower element. And earth, and gardener...if you continue, you will see a multitude of non-flower elements in the flower. In fact, a flower is made only with non-flower elements. It does not have a separate self.

A flower cannot be by herself alone. A flower has to "inter-be" with everything else that is called non-flower. That is what we call inter-being. You cannot be, you can only inter-be. The word inter-be can reveal more of the reality than the word "to be". You cannot be by yourself alone, you have to inter-be with everything else. So the true nature of the flower is the nature of inter-being, the nature of no self. The flower is there, beautiful, fragrant, yes, but the flower is empty of a separate self. To be empty is not a negative note. Nargarjuna, of the second century, said that because of emptiness, everything becomes possible.

So a flower is described as empty. But I like to say it differently. A flower is empty only of a separate self, but a flower is full of everything else. The whole cosmos can be seen, can be identified, can be touched, in one flower. So to say that the flower is empty of a separate self also means that the flower is full of the cosmos. It's the same thing. So you are of the same nature as a flower: you are empty of a separate self, but you are full of the cosmos. You are as wonderful as the cosmos; you are a manifestation of the cosmos. So non-self is another guide that Buddha offers us in order for us to successfully practice looking deeply. What does it mean to look deeply? Looking deeply means to look in such a way that the true nature of impermanence and non-self can reveal themselves to you. Looking into yourself, looking into the flower, you can touch the nature of impermanence and the nature of non-self, and if you can touch the nature of impermanence and non-self deeply, you can also touch the nature of nirvana, which is the Third Dharma Seal.

We have spoken about two dimensions of reality. The first dimension is described as the historical dimension, *dimension historique*, and the other dimension, the ultimate dimension. When we look at a wave, we see that the wave is revealed through many characteristics. The wave seems to have a beginning and the wave seems to have an end. The wave seems to have an "up" and a "down". The wave can be seen as this or that, more beautiful or less beautiful than that, more intelligent, more spiritual or less spiritual than the other waves. And these ideas, such as birth and death, beginning or end, high or low, more or less beautiful, make the life of the wave miserable. If the wave is caught into these notions, the wave does not seem to understand impermanence and non-self. In fact, the wave is made of all the other waves. You can calculate that wave is born from the movement of the water, and looking into the wave, if you make a study of it, you can understand what is going on in the ocean. It is like the nuclear scientists who said that one electron is made of all the other electrons. One electron can be simultaneously here and there, everywhere. That language cannot be easily understood by those of us who do not know anything about nuclear physics.

Those of us who have practiced looking deeply into the nature of no-birth and no-death, who understand the kind of language that the Buddha used, have heard that the wave, while living her life as a wave, can learn to live the life of water at the same time. If she can go back to herself, and touch the water within herself, she will get rid of all these notions: beginning and end, high and low, more or less beautiful. Once she knows that she is water, then all the fear, all the jealousy, all the discrimination will vanish, and she will have peace. We are also like that. Touching our true nature of no-birth and no-death, we will no longer be afraid of anything, whether that is being or non-being, whether that is beginning or ending, coming or going, one or many. Nirvana here means the silencing of all notions, including the notions of coming, going, being, non-being, birth and death. If you have a coin, that can be an example. You see the head, the tail, two aspects of the franc. One is impermanence, one is no self; in fact, these are the same, they belong to the same reality. And there is a third dimension: that is the metal that the piece of money is made of. It is nirvana; it is the base for the other things. So impermanence and non-self are what we experience when we begin to touch the world of birth and death, when we touch the historical dimension. If we know how to touch, we will touch the nature of impermanence, of non-self. And when we touch this nature deeply, we touch



nirvana. You don't have to leave the world of the phenomena in order to touch the world of the noumena. You don't have to stop being a wave in order to become water. You can live your historical dimension deeply, with mindfulness, then you can touch very deeply your true nature of being.

There was a student of meditation in Vietnam, who lived in the thirteenth century. One day he heard his master saying that you should make an effort to enter into the realm of no-birth and no-death. And the student asked, "Respected Teacher, where can I find the realm of no-birth and no-death?" and the teacher said, "You can find it right in the world of birth and death." Where do you tell the wave to go to find water? You find water right in the wave. So nirvana, the nature of no-birth and no-death, is right there in the world of birth and death, if you know how to touch it, because birth and death is only an appearance.

To be born, what does it mean? In our minds, to be born means that from nothing you suddenly become something, from no one, you suddenly become someone; but looking deeply you don't see anything like that. From nothing, how could something become something? A sheet of paper, before it was born as a sheet of paper, was it nothing? Or was it something already. The sheet of paper, before it was born, was the sunshine, the cloud, and the tree. The moment of its birth was only a moment of transformation, of continuation. So that is not exactly the moment of birth. The moment of your birth is only a moment of continuation, because before you were born, you have already been there. From nothing, you can never become something. From no one, you can never become someone. That is why, instead of singing "happy birthday to you", we should sing "happy continuation day to you". Also, at the moment of our so-called death, we can sing the same: happy continuation to you. You continue in other forms. But you don't need this moment to come in order for you to continue.

When I look at myself, I see very clearly that I have begun my continuation a long time ago. If you look at me a little more deeply, you will find out that I am not only here, I am elsewhere, like an electron, which is at the same time here, and there. If you get in touch with my disciples, my students, you recognize my presence in them. If you pick up a book or a tape in a distant city, you know that I am there. So I am not really only here. I am everywhere. I have gone into many directions. It is very difficult for you to identify my presence if you don't practice looking deeply. And it is impossible for me to die. I will continue for a long time. And I am in you. You cannot reduce me into nothingness. My practice, my being, my insight, my suffering, my happiness, have gone very far, so far that I have no means to know. I am now in my own country giving Dharma talks, doing sitting meditation with other people. I am now in a distant prison, because there are prisoners who are practicing sitting meditation and walking meditation using my books. I am in China, I am in Japan, I am in Russia. So it is not easy to identify my presence, if you don't know how to practice looking deeply.

In Zen circles, sometimes they may give you a subject of meditation to ponder: "Tell me, novice, what did your face look like before your grandmother was born?" That is a very nice invitation to go on a journey to find your true self, your true nature, the nature of no-birth and no-death. Nirvana is not something that we don't have, that we have to attain. Just as water is not something that the wave does not already have: the wave has always been water. We have been "nirvanized" a long time ago. We need only to go deep into ourselves to recognize the fact that our ground of being is nirvana. If you come from the Christian tradition, you might like to call it God--Nirvana, the ground of your being, the ground of no-birth and no-death. There is no reason for you to be afraid, and you can enjoy every moment of your daily life that is available to you. The greatest gift that the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara can make to you is the gift of non-fear. The insight into the nature of no-birth and no-death is the ultimate aim of the practice. It would be a pity if you came to a practice center and did not learn anything about that. There are many discourses of the Buddha on this subject. Enjoy your studies and enjoy your practice.

(Three bells)

(End of Dharma talk)

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# Living Together in Harmony

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Sister Annabel's summary of Thay's translation for the children:

Two young people, one representing America, one representing Europe, were talking about the happiness in their daily lives, the difficulties they meet every day, and the things they want to have happen. The girl who represents North America said that when she hears the birds sing in the morning, it brings her happiness. When she meets her friends, her dear ones, she feels happy. When she's in touch with what is wonderful in the present moment, she is happy. Her difficulty is that she is pulled back into the past. The suffering she has had in the past seems to imprison her, and stop her going deeply into the happiness of the present moment. Another difficulty she has is that everything is impermanent, but she wants nothing to change, from her body to her soul, her mind, the things around her, she wants them to stay exactly as they are, but the truth is that everything is impermanent and changing.

The girl who represents Europe said that when she came here she had a lot of happiness, but that she had one very big difficulty: that her father and mother were always fighting. And every time that would happen she suffered a great deal. She really wants to tell her father and mother that she loves them very much, and say to them: "Don't make me suffer anymore." That is her deepest desire. The girl from the United States also said that one of her deep desires is to be able to tell her father that she loves him.

The girl from Europe said that when she came here she wanted to be able to practice so as to be strong enough to tell her parents that they shouldn't fight anymore. It seems so easy.

If we come here and we practice we will be able to do that—we will be able to tell our parents what we need to tell them. So, please smile and breathe, listening to the bell: "Breathing in. I know I am at Plum Village with all my friends; breathing out, I smile to Plum Village and all my friends."

(Three bells)

Dear Sangha, today is the nineteenth of July, 1998. We are in the Lower Hamlet, and the Dharma talk will be in Vietnamese. Somebody asked, "Can you tell me what is an ideal father?" Somebody else replied, "An ideal father is someone who knows how to love Mother and how to make Mother happy." It seems to be a very simple answer, but it's also very deep. What does a child need most of all? Does he need money to buy presents; does she need money to buy toys? What does a child need most of all? What a child needs most of all is the love of the father.

There are many children who have so many toys and so much pocket money, but they're not happy because their father is always making their mother suffer, and often the children are very sad. They want to run away, because the atmosphere in the family is so heavy, like the atmosphere before a heavy storm. The atmosphere is a suffering atmosphere, in the house and in the family, and Father brings about this atmosphere when he makes Mother suffer. So the child wants to run away, but where can he or she run? In former times we may have had a house and a nice garden, with a little pond, with plenty of room, and the child could run out into the garden and sit by the pond, or

run to a neighbor, meet an aunt or an uncle in the village...but now, we may be living in a high apartment block, and the child in this environment has no where to run to--there's only one place, and that is the toilet or bathroom, to close the door and run away there. This suffocating, heavy atmosphere destroys and withers the child, so the child wants to run away, and the child doesn't know where to go, so she goes into the toilet and cries on her own. But even in the toilet she doesn't feel safe, because she can still hear the voices of Mother crying or Father talking.

The children who live right in the middle of such an atmosphere cannot grow up in a fresh and beautiful way; it is just like the tree in the garden when there is no sunshine or no rain or no gardener to look after it. When such a tree grows up, it also has to have a family: it has to have a wife, a husband and children. But it doesn't know how to make the family happy, because the child has not learned that from Father. The child doesn't know how to love Mother, how to look after Mother. The father did not know how to look after Mother, and because the child has never seen Father look after Mother, he hasn't been able to learn how to love. When that child marries he or she repeats the mistakes of Father or Mother, and these mistakes bring about suffering again for the dear ones. This is what we call *Samsara*; it means the cycle of rebirth, which never comes to an end, and from one generation to the next, this suffering continues to be handed down. Only when we are able to be in touch with the real teachings and learn ways of practice are we able to break into this cycle of suffering called *Samsara*.

When children come to Plum Village, they can learn ways to break this cycle, so that they can open up a new area in which the father will have the capacity, the art of bringing happiness, care and love to his wife. Many young people say that the most precious gift, which parents can give to their children, is the happiness of the parents. The children don't need a lot: all they need is for their parents to be happy together, and that is enough for the children to be happy. So if we are a mother or a father, we must know that the thing our child needs most is our happiness, and our happiness with our spouse. That is the greatest gift we can give our children. And if our parents want to make each other happy, they should know how to practice the Fourth Mindfulness Training, at the very least. The Fourth Mindfulness Training is the capacity to listen deeply, and to speak gently and lovingly. Deep listening, loving speech, this is all parents need to learn, and they will be able to establish communication, and not make each other suffer. Then they will offer to their children a great deal of happiness.

Listening deeply is something we have to learn to do—we can't do it just like that. When the other person is talking he or she is trying to express his or her difficulties and sufferings, and needs us to listen to that. But if we are not capable of listening, then the person who is speaking will not feel any relief in his or her suffering, and will finally give up talking. So when we love someone, our wife, our husband, our children, our father, we need to practice listening deeply to that person. Maybe our father does not know how to listen to our mother, or our mother does not know how to listen deeply to our father, but what of us? Do we know how to listen deeply to our mother and father? Sometimes we say, "My mother doesn't listen to my father, my father doesn't listen to my mother." But we ourselves do not listen deeply to our mother or father either. Therefore, mother, father and child, when they go to the temple, when they go to the meditation center, must practice listening deeply, because listening deeply is the practice of Bodhisattva *Avalokiteshvara*. This morning the monks and nuns have sung the praises of the Bodhisattva *Avalokiteshvara*, who has a very skilful way of listening deeply. That is why she is called *Quan The Am*: it means, "observing the sounds that come from the world."

People who have suffering, who have feelings hidden deep in their hearts, which they have not been able to express, they need an opportunity to express this suffering, and if no one sits to listen to them, how can they have that opportunity to express these hidden feelings of suffering? Therefore we need to practice looking deeply into that person, and that is the way to show that we love them. If we are a father and we want to listen to our children, we can sit alongside our child in silence, and then we say: "My dear child, please tell me, do you have any difficulties? Do you have any suffering? Please tell me. I want to listen so I can see if I can help you at all." So the father says this with his heart. And if we are a wife, and we know our husband has sufferings and difficulties which he has not been able to talk about, we go to our husband, and sit silently, very freshly, alongside him, and then we say: "My dear husband, do you have any suffering? Do you have any difficulties hidden in your heart? Please let me know about them." The wife must say that.

If we are a husband or a father and we have suffering—and we all have suffering; some of us have a great deal, some of us have a little—when the other person says that to us, we see we have an opportunity to say what we want to. At first it's difficult for us to say it. No one has tried to listen to us before, and now when somebody invites us to speak like that, we're not sure if we really believe it. But the wife, or whoever asks the question, should be patient

and say, "Please, please tell me. It may be because of my un-skillfulness, my foolishness, that you suffer, and I want to hear this. Please tell me if I do anything foolish or clumsy which makes you suffer. I promise that I will sit by you very calmly and silently and listen, because I am practicing as a student of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. I will not judge, I will not react, I will not be angry. My teacher and my Sangha have told me how to practice being peaceful and calm, how to eat peacefully, how to walk peacefully, how to sit peacefully, and now I am able to sit and listen. I'm not like I used to be." We can try to persuade our husbands like that, so he can say his difficulties for us to hear.

If we are children, we shouldn't think that only we suffer, as children. Father suffers Father has difficulties. Therefore we can practice, and we can say, "Daddy, I know you are my father, but I know you have difficulties. Sometimes you are angry with me, sometimes you are upset with me, sometimes I don't do what you like, but that is because I don't know your heart, I don't know your difficulties. And now I want to hear you; I want to hear the things that you don't like about me, that you think I can improve. And I will listen to you, I will listen with the heart of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, because I have been to the meditation center, I have met the monks and nuns, I have met the Sangha and I have learned how to sit and listen deeply. So please, Father, tell me, and I will be like Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. I will sit and listen very attentively. I will listen with all my ears, not half my ears, and I will listen with my heart, because Avalokiteshvara is one who can listen with both the ears and with the heart, and can listen for an hour like that." When the child listens to the father for an hour like that, the father will feel much better.

We all have to practice in the family: mother, father, and child. We can't just listen deeply because we want to do it, we have to practice first, because if we stop listening halfway through, the other person will feel: "What a waste of time!" If we are listening and people say things that are completely wrong—they have misunderstood us completely—when they describe these things, we feel their lack of loyalty towards us, we feel their misunderstanding, we hear them condemning and criticizing us, and as we listen to them, it may water all the seeds of our suffering. We can shout back at them or we can run out, but if we do either, we have not succeeded in our practice of listening deeply.

Have Father and Mother been successful yet in practicing listening deeply? If Mother and Father have not yet been successful, we as children have to help them. We have to listen to Father and Mother. We have to prove that we as children are able to listen deeply. We are able to understand our father, we are able to listen to our mother and understand our mother. And we can go to our mother and say, "Mother, you know I went to Father, I listened deeply, and now I understand Father, and I see Father suffers much less. Please, Mother, do the same thing. I'm going to help you to be able to sit and listen deeply to Father."

If you are only a child, you may only be small, you may not have great wisdom, but you have been in touch with Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, with the monks and the nuns, and you can also help your father. "Father, have you practiced listening to Mother yet? My mother has so many difficulties and sadness in her heart, many things you don't know about. So please, father, listen to mother deeply. I've practiced listening to mother deeply, and I know you can do it. I will support you. Father, please listen to mother deeply, please do so in silence, and when mother says something that's not true, don't get angry; just breathe and listen deeply so she suffers less. Don't listen deeply in order to blame, in order to criticize. And if you can't do it yet, Father, please go to the meditation center and learn walking meditation, learn sitting meditation, learn how to walk in mindfulness and to eat in mindfulness, and then after a matter of days you will be able to practice listening deeply."

Listening deeply is the most wonderful practice of Buddha and Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, and when we say the name of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, it means that we accept Avalokiteshvara as our teacher. Avalokiteshvara has the capacity to listen deeply. Therefore, if we are a student of Avalokiteshvara, we have to practice listening deeply too. Today, you very little children have heard this; remember the words I have just taught you. When Father and Mother are not happy together, you have to join your palms and say to them, "Mother, Father, where is my present? My present is your happiness. If you don't give me that present I'm going to suffer a lot." That is a bell of mindfulness to wake up Mother and Father, and then Mother and Father will try to practice.

When you little children hear the sound of the bell, please stand up, and bow, and you can go out. But the older children please stay behind—only the very tiny ones go out now.

(Bell)

greatest gift you can give me is your happiness. Please give me that present."

(Bell)

Today, we have begun to learn about a method of deep listening. As we already know, we have to practice before we can listen deeply. Sometimes we can also translate "deep listening" as compassionate listening, that is, to listen with compassion, or to listen with love. We hear with one aim only; we don't listen in order to criticize, to blame, to correct the person who is speaking or to condemn the person. We only listen with one aim, and that is to relieve the suffering of the one we are listening to. We have to sit still, we have to sit with inner freedom, and we have to be one hundred percent present, body and mind, listening so the other can relieve his or her suffering. If the other person says things which are not right, which are wrong perceptions, we may have a wish to respond, to say, "That's wrong!" and to argue with them. But we mustn't do that—we have to sit and listen. If we can sit for an hour, that is a golden hour. That hour is an hour, which can heal and transform.

We can do much better than psychotherapists, because there are psychotherapists who haven't learned how to listen deeply, who haven't learned how to listen compassionately. Psychotherapists have their own suffering, maybe a great deal of suffering, so that their capacity to listen deeply may not be very great. We don't know much about the theories of psychotherapy, but we have practiced stopping and looking deeply, we have already practiced listening deeply, and therefore we can do better than psychotherapists. We use the method of listening deeply, first of all for our loved ones and our family, and once we are successful with our family we can help our friends. We can listen deeply so that the world suffers less; that is our practice. Of course, psychotherapists have to learn how to listen deeply according to the practice in order to be really good psychotherapists.

When we can listen deeply, when we know how to do it, when we know how to speak lovingly as well, that has the function of reviving the communication between two people. Actually, when we know how to listen deeply, we will already speak lovingly. (Next time I talk, we will learn about using loving speech, and that belongs to the Fourth Mindfulness Training. We will learn more about these things in our Dharma discussions.) In our own time, the technology of communication is very great. We have all kinds of communication, like e-mail, fax and telephone, and therefore we can be in touch with each other very quickly, and in a couple hours the news can be taken from one end of the world to the other. But, there is obstruction in the communication between people in the family, between father and son, between wife and husband. Therefore, it is very important for us to learn how to listen deeply.

The children have spoken the truth: the reason that father and mother make each other suffer is that they don't understand each other, they don't know how to listen to each other deeply. They don't have the capacity to use loving speech. Father and mother do not know that while they are making each other suffer, they are also making their children suffer. And who are their children? Their children are their continuation. To say it in another way, our children are ourselves. And when we make ourselves suffer, when we make our husband or wife suffer, we are also making our children suffer. Our children will also make our grandchildren suffer, because we don't have the capacity to show to our children the art of making happiness, or the art of making our spouses happy. And how can our children learn that, if they can't learn it from us? If they don't learn it, they will grow up and make the same mistakes we have made, and this cycle of Samsara will carry on in our children; and our suffering will be handed on to our children, and our children's suffering will be handed on to our grandchildren, and this cycle of Samsara will never come to an end. We have to put an end to this cycle by the method of listening deeply and using loving speech. Using loving speech and listening deeply will establish communication, and when there is communication and understanding between us, then happiness will be there.

Maybe in former times Mother and Father could smile to each other: in that moment when they first knew each other, when they first fell in love, and they did not know that this person was going to live with them for the rest of their lives. So when a couple makes a decision, in a superficial way, to live together for their whole lives, and these two bodies have come to live together, but their souls are not in harmony, there is not communication, there is not understanding, there is not sharing of the deep things of their souls, then there is no communication. If we are young, we know that in former times our father was a young person, our mother was young too, and in those moments when they first came together and when they had not yet shared the deepest things of their hearts, then they made a mistake. That started their suffering for the rest of their lives. And we see that as children we are continuing with that suffering, and if we are not skilful, if we are not clever, we will repeat the mistakes our mothers

other person. We don't want to do as our mother and father have done, but in the end we will do as our mother and father did, and we will make our partner suffer, and we will give birth to children who will suffer too, and that is called Samsara.

A person is made out of body and mind. If there is only communication between the bodies but not between the souls, that is something very dangerous. When we love each other, we want to be close to each other, but is this closeness a closeness of souls, where there is communication, where there is understanding, where we can share spiritual values together? Then the coming together of the two bodies will have meaning and will bring happiness. But if two bodies come together without a coming together of the souls, then there will be suffering, and we will not be able to tell our children what real love is. Then we can call the coming together of the two bodies "empty sex."

When children of twelve or thirteen years old, or thirteen or fourteen years old, come together, and sleep together, what will happen? There is the coming together of the two bodies, pushed along by sexual desire, and then the two children don't understand each other, don't know anything about each other, they don't know what love is. That is the thing that we call empty sex, and it is very dangerous, because then those two young people will go deep into the path of sexual desire, where there's nothing else but sex, no understanding. This is taught very clearly in the Asian tradition, and I think this existed in former times in the Western tradition as well.

In the Asian tradition, our bodies are also sacred, like our souls, and we cannot share our bodies with just anybody. In our bodies there are areas, which are very sacred, like the top of our head, for example. Usually a father and mother in Vietnam, when their child is standing in front of them at the age of three or four years old, will ask their child: "My child, do you love your parents?" and the child says, "I love Mommy, I love Daddy." And the parents ask, "Where do you put your love for your parents?" and the child says "I put my love for my parents on my head." The top of the head, as far as the Asian person is concerned, especially a Vietnamese person, is the altar; and on that altar we put the most sacred thing. For example, if we go into a house in Vietnam, we may see that that house is very poor, but there is always an ancestral altar. That ancestral altar is very sacred. We put maybe just one plate of fruit or a vase of flowers, or some incense on that table. We don't go to the market and then put down the shopping bag on the ancestral altar when we come home. That is a great irreverence, and nobody would ever do that.

As far as our body is concerned, the altar of our body is the top of our head, and we worship the Buddha, we worship the ancestors on the top of our head. And as far as a Vietnamese person is concerned, if somebody else puts his or her hand on our head, that is very irreverent. There are Westerners who don't understand that and they may put their hand on our head, but we feel like saying to them, "Please, put your hand on my shoulder, but not on my head. Otherwise I will feel very offended, I feel that's very offensive."

If the monks and nuns in Plum Village are holding something precious, related the Dharma, such as their Sutra or their Sanghati robe, and somebody comes to say hello to them or to give them a letter, they have to put their Sanghati robe on their head, on the altar of their body. That is the worthiest place to put their robe. They could not put it on the earth. You cannot put the *Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*, or the *Amitabha Sutra* on the earth. We feel respect for the Sutra, the Sutra is a Dharma jewel, and we have to put it in a very clean place. It is the same with our Sanghati robe; our Sanghati robe was given to us by the Buddha, by our teacher, so we can make ceremonies. We cannot put it on the earth. If there's no table nearby, we have to put it on top of our heads, and when we receive the letter we put it in our pocket, and then we take the robe off our head and hold it in our hands.

Apart from the top of our heads, there are other sacred parts of our body. There are other parts of our body that we don't want anyone to see, that we don't want anyone to touch. This is true of a girl, and it is true of a boy. Our body is sacred, like our soul. In our soul, there are sacred areas we don't want anyone to see or to touch. There are experiences; there are images, which we want to keep hidden just for ourselves. We don't want to share them with anybody--only when that person is someone in whom we have the most confidence in the world, whom we love most in the world, then we will take those things from the depths of our hearts and we will show them to them. But the number of people in this world with whom we can share these things are very few, probably only one. There are areas in our soul that are forbidden areas, like in the imperial city, where there are the forbidden places you can't enter. If you go in you will be arrested, and you will have your head cut off. Our soul is the same, and our body is the same. There are secret areas that are very sacred, and we can't allow just anyone to come in. We can hold someone's hand, we can put our hand on somebody's shoulder, but if we touch these sacred areas, these secret areas

Only when we have a friend who really understands us, who really loves us, who will die with us, can we share those deeply hidden areas of our bodies and our souls. And then the coming together of two bodies is like a very sacred ceremony. This coming together of the two bodies is at the same time the coming together of two souls, and it will bring about happiness. In former times this was very clear as far as Eastern people were concerned, and I am confident that in the Western tradition that exists also, but it has been lost for many of us; we look down on our bodies, we look down on our souls, and we do not see their sacredness. And we do not look after our bodies and souls at the time of coming together with another body. When these children of thirteen and fourteen have sex together, it is something very dangerous. They do not know what love is, they do not know what the body is, they do not know what the soul is. And if they do that, in the future they won't have the opportunity to know what real love is, what real communication is. This is a fruit that is not yet ripe; this is a flower, which has not yet opened. Therefore, we have to protect our young people.

If we are young people, we have to protect our own bodies, and we have to know the Third Mindfulness Training, on knowing how to practice chastity. If we have sex without protecting the integrity of our body and our mind, or of the body and mind of the person we love, we are offending against the Third Mindfulness Training. And if two bodies have sex when there is not yet the meeting of the two souls, when there is not yet understanding, it is very dangerous. We have to avoid it, we have to stop it, we shouldn't allow it to happen. Otherwise we are going against the teachings of the Third Mindfulness Training.

In the 1930's and 1940's there was a young poet who wrote just about love poetry, and one day he wrote a poem that said:

You're Still Very Far Away

One day you were sitting far from me.

I asked you to come and sit near to me.

You came a little nearer, and I was upset.

You came a little nearer all the time.

I was about to get angry.

You quickly stood up

And came and sat near me.

There you were. I was happy.

But soon I became sad again,

Because I saw that we were still very far from each other:

Sitting very near, still very far.

Why far? We were sitting next to each other,

Our bodies were right next to each other.

Why were we far?

Because there was still not communication between our souls.

The two universes were still far apart.



dividing them. When we sleep with a person, we may feel that because we are near them, there is communication; but that is an illusion. The coming together of two bodies can bring about greater separation than there was before. Many people have witnessed that if there is not understanding, communication, real love, deep sharing in our ideals and our life, and we put our two bodies together and have sex together, then not only will there be no communication at that time, but a huge rift can be dug between us, and that is very dangerous.

When the poet wrote this poem he did not want to say what I have said here, but he said it in poetry: "I was angry because you were not near enough to me, but when you came and sat very near to me, I thought I was satisfied. But that satisfaction existed only for a few moments, and then I was sad because I saw that we were not close at all. But there's no way for us to get closer. The only way we could have gotten closer was by deep understanding, by being able to share with each other our suffering, our ideals, our difficulties." Therefore, to practice communication by listening deeply, and by speaking lovingly is so important.

(Bell)

In Buddhism there is an expression, a very sweet expression: *kalyanamitra*, which means a friend in the practice, a spiritual friend. This is a friend who helps us to go forward on our spiritual path. We are happy when we have a friend who can support us, who can protect us, who can help us to go forward on the path of understanding and love, the path of making others happy. If we have a spiritual friend like that, we have to do all we can to keep that friend, because if we lose that friend, we can lose everything. This is the most necessary companion in life. He has stopped us going through the paths of darkness; he has held us so we can go on the path of our ideal. That is the spiritual friend, the *kalyanamitra*. *Mitra* means friend. *Kalyana* means good. If the person we love is a *kalyanamitra*, then we are fortunate, because in that person there is the essence called inner freedom, or happiness. If we can go on our spiritual path, our life's path, with such a person, then we are someone with happiness. Maybe we have a spiritual friend like that, but maybe we have not been able to recognize that we have a spiritual friend. We could lose that person easily if we don't recognize that they are a spiritual friend. Maybe near us there is someone like that, ready to be our friend on the path, ready to support us, to protect us, to help us; but because we do not dwell in the present moment, we do not have clear vision, we cannot see that that person is present. And if we return to the present moment and look around, we may discover, "I have a *kalyanamitra*, a precious spiritual friend." When we have been able to recognize our *kalyanamitra*, we will have a great deal of happiness, and we will make a deep vow that we will never say or do anything to lose this person from our life.

When I was young, when I was a novice, I read that our father and mother gave us physical birth, but the person who helps us to realize our ideal is our spiritual friend. Although our parents gave us birth, they may not be able to help us realize our spiritual ideal. But our friend, our *kalyanamitra*, is the person who will help us to realize our path. And this is also true of teacher and disciple. Our teacher has given birth to our spiritual life, but maybe our teacher can't help us to grow up on the spiritual path, maybe we have to have spiritual friends, and only then can we grow up on the spiritual path. When I was sixteen years old I really learned these words; "Mother and Father give us physical life, and our spiritual friend is the one who helps us realize the path." I have never forgotten these words, and I realize that if I were to lose my spiritual friend, I could lose my spiritual life. Therefore we have to be so careful.

In the *Avatamsaka Sutra* it says that the *kalyanamitra* is the person who is able to help us to keep our *bodhicitta*, that is our mind of awakening, our mind of love. Our *bodhicitta* is a very great energy in our life of practice, and our following the path of practice. The *bodhicitta*, the mind of love, is the energy, which wants us to go towards transformation of suffering, not only in ourselves, but in all those around us. And when we have this mind of love, we are strong, and when our *bodhicitta* is solid and firm, then our path ahead is very straight. We have energy and we have solidity. But if this *bodhicitta* is weakened or fades, then our happiness will fade also, and we will not be able to offer happiness to those around us, to those we love, and others too. Therefore, keeping the *bodhicitta*, in order to be able to continue on the path of our deepest ideal, is something very important, and the person who can help us to keep this *bodhicitta* solidly is our *kalyanamitra*. Therefore our spiritual friend is the one who is able to help us to dwell with and in our *bodhicitta*, so that our *bodhicitta*, our mind of life, never falls from our heart.

In our life we need to find a spiritual friend. If we do not yet have that person, we should look for them. We may have a teacher, but a teacher is not enough. We need a friend, and that friend, that *kalyanamitra*, is our place of refuge. We may find that friend in a Sangha: someone we trust, someone whom, when we sit next to them we feel

spiritual friend, for being present in my life. A kalyanamitra, according to the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, is someone who helps us grow up in our capacity to practice solidly, to practice diligently. This person induces us to develop our wholesome roots, because we all have wholesome roots, we all have the seeds of love, of forgiveness, of joy, of wisdom and of happiness. These seeds are present in the souls of all of us, but our kalyanamitra is the person who has the capacity every day to water those seeds, to help those seeds grow up. If we do not have a kalyanamitra, the good seeds in our soul, in our hearts, will not continue to develop. Therefore I need my kalyanamitra just as a tree needs the light of the sun everyday.

If we are still young, we should know that we need a spiritual friend. Many friends will draw us into dark parts, which will destroy our body and our mind, and we will not have the energy and the joy of life. We should recognize that these friends are not people that we should be close to; people like this we cannot call kalyanamitra. Instead of spiritual friends, we have to call them "evil friends." We need to stay away from anyone we recognize as evil friend, an unwholesome friend, somebody who draws us into wine bars, into places where drugs are used, where there are addicts, people who speak roughly, people who don't know how to listen deeply, people whose words are as violent as their actions. If we live with them, if we keep going back to them, our bodies and our minds will be destroyed by them, we will make ourselves suffer, and we will make our parents suffer. So we have to recognize who are the unwholesome friends, who are the good spiritual friends, and when we have found the good spiritual friends, we have to be determined not lose them. Father and Mother gave us our physical birth, but those who help us grow upon the path of practice are our spiritual friends.

Our spiritual friend is someone who knows how to live in mindfulness, who knows how to live according to the principles of the five mindfulness Trainings. Living according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings is living under the protection of the Three Energies. These Three Energies protect us and direct us, look after us, and these Three Energies are Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. These three energies are not ideas, or something outside of us. These three energies are things we can be in touch with when we are mindful.

What is Buddha? Buddha is awakening, Buddha is the energy of awakening, Buddha is mindfulness. Whenever we return and dwell peacefully in the present moment, whenever our bodies and minds come back and are one, whenever we know how to breathe mindfully, walk mindfully, eat mindfully, recognize the presence of our loved ones, Buddha is present, and that energy is called the energy of awakening, of mindfulness. When we have that energy in us, we know we have Buddha in our hearts, and Buddha is protecting us. Buddha is not some symbol. Buddha is not a god. Buddha is not one person. In the past there have been many Buddhas, in the present there are many Buddhas, and in the future there will be many Buddhas. Buddha is anyone who has the energy of awakening, the energy of love, of understanding and mindfulness. That is what we call Buddha, and all of us have the seeds of mindfulness, of love, of understanding, of forgiveness in us, and when we return to ourselves and recognize those seeds in us and we help those seeds to grow, then we are in touch with Buddha in our own persons. There is no one who does not have the seeds of Buddha; there is no one who does not have the capacity to be in touch with Buddha in their own person. Therefore to practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings is a wonderful method, very concrete, for mindfulness always to be there in our daily lives. And mindfulness is Buddha. And this Buddha is not the past; Buddha is the present.

And what is Dharma? Dharma is the practice of mindfulness, all the different ways of practicing mindfulness. We could say that Dharma is the Dharma talk, Dharma is the Sutra, but a Dharma talk or a sutra is not the living Dharma. Living Dharma is when we know how to walk mindfully, when we know how to sit mindfully, when we know how to eat mindfully, we know how to breathe mindfully, we know how to recognize what is happening in the present moment. These practices are living Dharma. If we practice mindfulness in our daily life, then we are making Dharma shine all around us. When people look at us they will see us as the living Dharma. Living Dharma is not made by images and sounds it is made by life. Therefore, someone who knows how to practice mindfulness when walking, sitting, washing clothes, making tea, looking after and loving, that person is a manifestation of living Dharma. Though that person does not give Dharma talks, such a person is giving a Dharma talk with his body with her life...teaching by their lives, and not just by Dharma talk. When we live like that we are protected by the second energy, called the energy of the true teachings.

The third energy is Sangha. Sangha is the community. In the community you have teachers, monks, nuns, and lay people. It is called the four-fold Sangha, and they are there to look after a practice center, so that the people practicing there are solid, and it is the safest place for us to come to. We can be protected there, because everyone

there is

practicing mindfulness, breathing mindfully, eating mindfully, working mindfully; therefore the energy of the Sangha will look after us and protect us.

And we practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings: the First, the Second, the Third, the Fourth and the Fifth. We talked a little bit before of the Third Mindfulness Training, how to protect our bodies, our integrity and our chastity, and that of others as well. We also talked a little bit about the Fourth Mindfulness Training, how to listen deeply and practice loving speech. When we practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we are practicing very concretely the method of mindfulness. Practicing mindfulness is to have the protection of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. When we practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings solidly, we will have a "precepts body," called *silakaya*, and this precepts body will protect us in our daily lives. When this precepts body is whole, that is because of our practice of the Mindfulness Trainings and of the Mindful Manners in a very wholesome way--we are protected by the three energies of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. When we offend against the Mindfulness Trainings and we offend against the Mindful Manners, our precepts body is cracked, and then we are not protected anymore. We fall into situations of danger, misfortune, because our precepts body has been broken, it is no longer whole. Wherever we go, fear goes with us. If, for instance, we are dying, we have an accident, we are wounded, we will feel that there is nothing to protect us. When people have been through accidents and dangers, they need the protection of their precepts body. Without it, they will be very afraid, and that fear will take away all their peace; when fear is there, we cannot overcome the accident, the death, the sickness, and the loss of our lives. If we don't want this to happen, the best thing we can do is to protect ourselves with the energy of mindfulness, to keep our precepts body whole, unbroken.

(Bell)

If you want to succeed in your practice, if you want to arrive at transformation and healing, you should rely on the Mindfulness Trainings, and you should rely on your spiritual friend. Your spiritual friend is someone who keeps the Mindfulness Trainings. That person is solid, has inner freedom, and is fearless. If we are near to someone like that, we will enjoy the freedom, the fearlessness and the solidity of that person. If in our lives we have these two things, the Mindfulness Trainings and our spiritual friend, then our lives will be successful. We should never allow these two things to fall from our hands—actually these two things are one. When we do not have a spiritual friend, we should look and find a spiritual friend. When we do not have Mindfulness Trainings, we should look and find Mindfulness Trainings.

In our relationships with our loved ones, our father, our mother, or our children, if there are difficulties, sufferings, we should rely on our Mindfulness Trainings and our spiritual friend to re-establish the communication, so that we will easily use loving speech and deep listening in order to bring about happiness for our family, and to open a path to a wholesome future. When we learn how to listen deeply and use loving speech, we can begin to re-establish communication between ourselves and our mother or our father, or with our husband, or our wife. If we cannot yet speak directly to them, we can write a letter to them, because writing a letter is a way of communicating, and it can be a very deep art. We write down what we want to say in a letter...maybe we can't say these things to him, we feel unnatural saying them, but we sit in our room, we take a piece of paper and a pen, and we say, "Dear father, do you know I love you? I understand you are suffering, I understand your difficulties, and I want to tell you that I love you, I understand you, and I want you to be happy." We can write it on a piece of paper, and when father reads it, he will feel released in his heart. A seed of suffering has been recognized by someone and there is someone who can understand him. And that person could be his own child—why should our spiritual friend not be our child?

I have organized retreats in Europe and the United States for young children, and when they have practice for seven or five days, they go home and make peace with their father and mother, and they bring their father and mother to the practice center. Even a child of twelve or thirteen years can play the role of kalyanamitra for their father and mother, and many children have been successful. This gives me much faith and happiness. If my child is going on the dark path, a dangerous path, and I am father or mother and I am worried about my child, and I cannot communicate with that child, the method is still the method of deep listening, speaking lovingly, and keeping the Mindfulness Trainings. We can practice, we can talk with all our love, and we can say, "My dear child, I know you have difficulties, I know you suffer and you have not been able to talk about it. Before I did not have the capacity to listen to you, but now I have begun a practice and I can listen to you. So please tell me, have I made some mistakes which have made you suffer?" If the child can say what it is, the child will suffer much less. And if you feel shy, if

you cannot yet say this to your child, you can write a letter to them.

We have lost our children. We cannot communicate with them anymore; we cannot share with them the beautiful and the good things. That is a great failure. We have received so many precious jewels from the culture and from the teachings of the Buddha, but because of our difficulties in communication with our children, we have not been able to hand on to them the precious and valuable things of our culture. So if we want to hand on these precious things, we need to have communication. There is only one way to re-establish communication, and that is by listening deeply and speaking lovingly. We have a pen, we have a piece of paper, so why do we not write a letter to be able to open the door of communication which for so long has been tightly closed. Our child is going on this dangerous and dark path. We have to become the kalyanamitra for our child. Why not? We are the father, we are the mother. We have to help our child. We have to be the kalyanamitra of our child. We have to practice loving speech and deep listening in order to open the door of communication again.

When we have been able to persuade our child, then there is a future. Because what is our future if it is not our child? If we lose our child, we do not have a future. Our child will continue us in the future, and will take us into the future. If we lose our child, how can we have that continuation, how can we continue in the future? Therefore, we have to practice in order to be able re-establish the communication, so that we can hand on the culture of our ancestors to our children. If all the children are cut off from their parents because of anger, then the whole cultural tradition will be cut, and all the valuable things which our ancestors left to us will not be handed on. If we can hand on these things, that is a wonderful gift for our society. In our society there are so many hungry ghosts, so many young people wandering around hungry, without any faith in their culture, in their family, in their parents, no faith in the school or university, no faith in the values that we accept. They have no place of refuge, they are like hungry ghosts, without love, without understanding. In our daily life we have thought about so many hungry ghosts, young people today. Among the youth of today, there are so many wandering spirits, who have no faith in anything in their culture. Therefore the duty of parents and grandparents is to become the kalyanamitra of their children and grandchildren. That is the greatest gift of love that we can give to our children. That is the way we can be bodhisattvas: we are our children's fathers, but we are also our children's friends. We want to be able to revive the communication between father and child. If we can do that, we are disciples of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara.

(Bell)

(End of talk)

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# Mara and the Buddha – Embracing our Suffering

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Dear friends, today is the 6th of August, 1996 and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We are going to speak English today.

I would like to tell you a story that took place a number of years ago. One day I saw the Venerable Ānanda—you know who he is? Ānanda is a cousin of the Buddha, a very handsome man with a very good memory. He memorized everything the Buddha said, and after the Buddha passed away, he repeated exactly what the Buddha said during his life. Then other monks tried to learn and memorize also. Later on, all this was put down into writing and that is why we have the Sutras today. "Sutras" means the teaching of the Buddha in written form. They exist in Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, and in Vietnamese, but originally it was in a kind of Bengali, very close to Pali and Sanskrit.

One day I saw the Venerable Ānanda practicing walking meditation in front of the hut of the Buddha. You know, Ānanda became a monk, a student of the Buddha. He was the attendant of the Buddha during many years. He took very good care of the Buddha. Of course, the Buddha loved him and there were people who were jealous of him. Sometimes Ānanda was so concerned about the happiness of the Buddha that he forgot about himself. Sometimes he did not enjoy what was there in the present moment, being much younger than the Buddha.

One day standing on the hill looking down, the Buddha saw beautiful rice fields. The rice was ripe, about to be harvested. But because Ānanda was only thinking of how to make the Buddha comfortable, he didn't see it. So the Buddha pointed to the rice fields below and said, "Ānanda can you see it's beautiful?" It was like a bell of mindfulness—suddenly Ānanda saw that the rice fields down there were so beautiful. The Buddha smiled and said, "Ānanda, I want the robes of the monks and the nuns to be designed in the form of rice fields—golden colors like the rice that is already ripe, small portions of the rice fields like that." Ānanda said, "Yes, that is possible, I will go tell my brothers and from now on we will make the sanghati, the robes of the monks and nuns, in the form of rice fields."

Another time when Ānanda was with the Buddha, north of the Gangha River in the city of Vaisali, the Buddha pointed to the city, the trees, and the hills, and said to Ānanda "Don't you see Vaisali is beautiful?" Then Ānanda took the time to look at the beauty of the city.

The day I saw Ānanda practicing walking meditation around the hut of the Buddha, he was trying to protect the Buddha from guests. Many guests came, and they always wanted to have a cup of tea with the Buddha, and the Buddha could not just receive guests all day. So Ānanda was trying to help. That day Ānanda was practicing walking around the hut of the Buddha. It's not exactly a hut, but a cave—the Buddha was staying in a cave, very cold. And Ānanda saw someone coming, coming, coming in his direction.

He had the impression that he knew this person, but just forgot his name. When that person had come very close, he

recognized him as Mara. You know Mara? Mara is the one who had caused the Buddha a lot of difficulties. The night before the Buddha attained final enlightenment, Mara was there to tempt him. Buddha was tempted by Mara. Mara is the tempter. He always wanted the Buddha to be a politician, to be a king, or a president, or a foreign minister, or running a business, having a lot of money, a lot of beautiful women; and he was always trying to tempt the Buddha so that Buddha would go into these directions. That is Mara.

Ánanda saw Mara approaching. He felt uncomfortable. Why should Mara come at this time? But Mara saw him already—Ánanda could not hide himself—so he had to stand there and wait for Mara and they had to say things like, "Hello, how do you do?" People say that even if they don't like each other. They say, "Hello, good morning, how are you," and so on. They don't mean it. Then they come to the real thing: "What are you here for Mara?" "I want to visit the Buddha," Mara said, "I want to see him." Ánanda said, "Why should you want to see the Buddha? I don't think the Buddha has time for you."

You know when the head of a corporation or a director of an office doesn't want to see you she says, "Go and tell him I am in conference." And Ánanda was about to say something like that, but he remembered that he had to practice the Five Precepts and could not tell a lie. So he refrained from saying that the Buddha is in conference. He was frank. He said, "Mara, why should the Buddha see you? What is the purpose and are you not ashamed of yourself? Don't you remember that in the old days, under the Bodhi tree, you were defeated by the Lord? How could you bear seeing him again? I don't think that he will see you. You are the enemy of the Buddha," and Ánanda continued to say what was really in his heart.

You know Mara was very aware, a very experienced person. He just stood there and looked at the young Venerable Ánanda and smiled. After Ánanda finished, he said, "What did you say Ánanda, you said the Buddha has an enemy?" Then Ánanda felt very uncomfortable to say that the Buddha had an enemy. That did not seem to be the right thing to say, but he just said it. He said, "I don't think that the Buddha will see you, you are his enemy," So if you are not very concentrated, very deep, very mindful, you may say things like that against yourself, against what you know and what you practice. When Mara heard Ánanda say that he is the enemy of the Buddha, he burst out laughing and laughing and laughing, and that made Ánanda very uncomfortable. "What, you're telling me that the Buddha also has enemies?"

So finally Ánanda was defeated, completely defeated. He had to go in and announce the visit of Mara, hoping that the Lord would say, "I have no time for him, I need to continue sitting." But to his surprise, the Buddha smiled beautifully and said, "Mara, wonderful! Ask him to come in." That surprised Ánanda. Remember Ánanda was young with not a lot of experience. All of us are Ánanda, you know. So Ánanda had to go out again and bow to Mara and ask him to come in because the Lord wanted Mara to be his guest.

The Buddha stood up, and guess what? The Buddha did hugging meditation with Mara. Ánanda did not understand. The Buddha invited Mara to sit on the best place in the cave—a stone bench. And he turned to his beloved disciple and said, "Ánanda, please make tea for us." You might guess that Ánanda was not entirely happy. Making tea for the Buddha—yes. He could do that 1,000 times a day. But making tea for Mara was not a very pleasant idea. But since the Lord had asked, Ánanda went into a corner and began to make tea for them and tried to look deeply, why things were like that.

When the tea was offered to the Buddha and the guest, Ánanda stood behind the Buddha and tried to be mindful of what the Buddha would need. You see, if you become a novice, you have to practice being an attendant to your teacher. You stand behind him or her and you try to know what your teacher needs each moment. But it did not seem that the Buddha needed anything. He just looked at Mara in a very loving way and he said, "Dear friend, how have you been? Is everything okay?" Mara said, "No, not okay at all. Things go very badly with me. You know something Buddha; I'm very tired of being Mara. Now I want to be someone else, like you. You are kind, wherever you go you are welcome. You are bowed to with lotus flowers, and you have many monks and nuns with very lovely faces following you. You are offered bananas and oranges and kiwis and all kinds of fruits.

"As a Mara I have to wear the appearance of a Mara. Everywhere I go I have to speak in a very tricky language. I have to show that I am really Mara. I have to use many tricks, I have to use the language of Mara, I have to have an army of wicked little Maras and if I breathe in and breathe out, every time I breathe out I have to show that smoke is coming from my nose. But I don't mind very much all these things. What I mind most is that my disciples, the little

Buddhahood. That's one thing I cannot bear. So I have come to propose to you that we exchange roles. You be a Mara and I'll be a Buddha."

When the Venerable Ānanda heard that, he was very scared. Oh, his heart was about to stop! What if his teacher accepted the exchange of roles? He would be the attendant of a Mara. So he was hoping that the Buddha would refuse the proposal. Then the Buddha looked at Mara very calmly, smiling to him, and asked this question: "Mara, do you think it's a lot of fun being a Buddha? People don't understand me—they misunderstand me and put a lot into my mouth that I have never said. They have built temples where they put statues of me in copper, in plaster, sometimes in emerald, in gold. And they attract a lot of people who offer them bananas, oranges, citrus, and a lot of things.

"Sometimes they carried me on the street in a procession and I was sitting on a cart decorated with flowers, doing like this—like a drunk person. I don't like being a Buddha like that. So you know, in the name of the Buddha—in my name—they have done a lot of things that are very harmful to the Dharma. You should know that being a Buddha is also very difficult. If you want to be a teacher and if you want people to practice the Dharma correctly, that is not an easy job. I don't think that you would enjoy being the Buddha. The best thing is for each of us to stay in his or her own position and try to improve the situation and enjoy what we are doing." Then the Buddha, in order to summarize all that he just said, read to Mara a verse, a gatha. But the gatha is a little bit too long, I don't remember. The essence of the gatha is just what I have said in the former part of the story.

If you were there with Ānanda and if you were very mindful, you would have had the feeling that Buddha and Mara were a couple of friends who need each other—like day and night, like flowers and garbage. This is a very deep teaching of Buddhism, and I trust that the children will understand—very deep. You may compare Buddha with the flowers, very fresh, very beautiful. And you may compare Mara with the garbage. It doesn't smell good. There are a lot of flies who like to come to the garbage. It's not pleasant to touch, to hold in your hand, to smell the garbage.

Yet all flowers become garbage. That is the meaning of impermanence: all flowers have to become garbage. If you practice Buddhist meditation, you find out about very interesting things—like about the garbage. Although garbage stinks, although garbage is not pleasant to hold in your hand, if you know how to take care of the garbage, you will transform it back into flowers. You know gardeners don't throw away garbage. They preserve the garbage and take care of the garbage, and in just a few months the garbage becomes compost. They can use that compost to grow lettuce, tomatoes, and flowers. We have to say that organic gardeners are capable of seeing flowers in garbage, seeing cucumbers in garbage. That is what the Buddha described as the non-dualistic way of looking at things.

If you see things like that, you will understand that the garbage is capable of becoming a flower, and the flower can become garbage. Thanks to the flowers there is garbage, because if you keep flowers for three weeks they become garbage, and thanks to the garbage there will be flowers. You now have an idea of the relationship between Buddha and Mara. Mara is not very pleasant, but if you know how to help Mara, to transform Mara, Mara will become Buddha. If you don't know how to take care of the Buddha, Buddha will become Mara.

You see there are people who, in the beginning, love each other very much. They believe that without each other they cannot survive. Their love is so important. They cling to each other because they think that love between them is the only element that can help them survive. But because they don't know how to preserve the love and take care of their love, they get angry at each other, they misunderstand each other, and later on love is transformed slowly into hate. There are those who say, "I hate you, I don't want to see you anymore, I wish you would die." Those people in the past had proclaimed that they needed each other, they could not survive without each other, they loved each other, so love transforms into hatred. It's like a kind of flower transformed into garbage.

So what you learn today is very deep. Flowers and garbage are of an organic nature because both flowers and garbage are living realities. Buddha and Mara are also organic, and they need each other. It is thanks to the difficulties, thanks to the temptations, that the Buddha has overcome his suffering and his ignorance and become a fully enlightened being. The day before yesterday, I gave a Dharma talk on suffering, and I said that if you look deeply into the nature of your suffering, you will find a way out of it. So if you want a flower, you have to use the garbage. That is why the people who suffer a lot now should not be discouraged. Suffering is their garbage. If they know how to take good care of their garbage they will be able to make the flower come back to them, the flower of peace, of joy. The Buddha shows us the way to do so.

When I was in Moscow several years ago, we offered a retreat to Muscovites, and a few Christians from Korea held a kind of a retreat very close to ours. Some of them came to our friends and asked why they should follow the Buddha. The reason we should not follow the Buddha, according to them, is that Buddha is a mortal. "Mortal" means someone who has to die. In their mind what we need is someone who will not die. Since the Buddha is someone who has to be born and who has to die, he cannot help us—that is the meaning of the declaration made by those friends.

I think it's a wonderful thing to die, because if you are born and you die, it means you are a living reality, like the flower and the garbage: they are living things. We are for life. Anything that is not born, not dying, not growing, is not alive. To be alive means to be born, to grow, to get old, to die, to be born again, to grow, to get old, to die and to continue like that. How do you expect life to be possible without change? But there is one thing that the children may like to know. There is a difference between "flower" and "flower-ness."

The flower may die, but not the flower-ness. Even if a flower has become garbage, you know you can bring the flower back. If you are a good gardener, if you know how to use compost, seeds, water, you will be able to bring the flower back. This means a flower may die, but flower-ness is something that is there all the time: because flower-ness is not a thing, flower-ness is the nature of a thing. So it is with Buddha and Buddha nature. Buddha nature is called in Sanskrit *buddhata*. We all have buddhata inside of us, this Buddha nature. If we want, we can make the Buddha be born every moment in our hearts. That is a very wonderful thing. You can make the Buddha be born in your heart every moment, because you have Buddhahood in you, you have the nature of the Buddha in you. Buddha is a living thing: Buddha is born, Buddha grows up, Buddha hides himself away, Buddha dies. But Buddhahood is there in us.

We might think that terms like "Buddha nature" are difficult because we don't know that this is something very simple, very simple. Children can understand very well. We have flower-ness in us; we have "garbage-ness" in us also. Don't think that they are two enemies—no. They look like enemies—Ānanda was not very skillful in seeing that—but they can support each other. In Buddhism, there is no fight between good and evil—that is the most wonderful thing in the Buddhist practice! There is no fight between good and evil. Good and evil are both organic matters. If you have understanding and wisdom, you will know how to handle both the flower and the garbage in you, you can make the Buddha be born every moment of your life, and peace and happiness will be possible. This is a very deep Dharma talk for young people. I hope that you will be able to deepen your understanding of this Dharma talk. Your big brothers and sisters and the Dharma teachers will help you. This may be a very important lesson that you will learn in your life.

[To the children:] When you hear the bell, please stand up and bow to the Sangha before you go out.

[Bell. Children leave]

In the beginning of this year's summer opening, we reflected on the fact that, for healing to take place in our body and in our soul, we have to learn how to allow our body and our consciousness to rest. That is the practice of stopping, of calming in order for healing to start. We talked about the animals in the jungle. When they are wounded or get sick, they always look for a quiet and safe place to lie down. They just lie down for many, many days. The animals do not think of hunting or eating or doing anything, because they feel they need to rest and they know that only resting can bring healing. They don't think of eating at all.

We humans we might think that if we don't eat anything, we grow weak and we cannot heal. We are not as wise as these animals, because fasting is a very wonderful way to help the body and also the soul to heal. Not thinking of doing anything—eating, running, making projects for the future, even for healing, practicing intensive meditation—all these things have to be stopped. No effort should be made either by the body or by the consciousness. We have to allow our body to really rest and also our consciousness. That is *samatha*, that is the practice of stopping and calming, and we have to learn it.

There are many of us who have no capacity for resting, of allowing our body and our mind to rest. That is because in us there is a very strong tendency to do something—running. We have run without stopping in the last four or five thousand years. It has become a habit. We even run in our dreams, during our sleep. So we have to start the practice of stopping. That is why practicing being in the present moment, touching the wonders of life that are



present in this moment, is a very wonderful and easy way of resting.

There's a tendency for us to think that our happiness should be searched for in the future, by doing something. Even our health should be "searched for" by doing something. But we don't know that not doing anything may be the key to restoring our health. Many of us are obsessed by the idea that we have to get more nutrients. We buy vitamins, "one-a-day," and we take one pill every morning and things like that. Many of us are motivated by that kind of desire. Not many of us are aware that we have a reserve in our body that we can use for up to three or four weeks without eating. Those of us who practice fasting and drinking only water, can go for many weeks and we don't have to stop the daily things. We can still go to sitting meditation, walking meditation, cleaning in the kitchen, in the bathroom, participating in Dharma talks. We can do that many weeks without eating. In the process, we enjoy doing these things. And the toxins we have, from the third day on, begin to get out because we are drinking a lot of water, we are practicing a lot of walking meditation and deep breathing and we clean our bodies, so the toxins can get out. And after three weeks, you look much better—even if you don't eat anything. Your skin, the expression on your face, your smile—you may look like a new person. That is not because you take a lot of vitamins, or eat a lot of nutrients, it is because you don't eat anything. You allow your body to rest.

The same thing is true of your consciousness. There are a lot of toxins within that have been accumulating over the years. We have ingested the toxins—the fear, the craving, the anger, the despair—in our daily life by touching this or that without mindfulness. So all these poisons have brought into being our depression, our anxiety, our sorrow—and this kind of garbage should be transformed, eliminated. If only we could allow ourselves to touch the refreshing and healing elements in our daily life, a process of detoxification would take place. Are you able to breathe in and to breathe out, and enjoy it? Just breathing in and breathing out. Is there anything interesting in breathing in and breathing out? Breathing in and breathing out is a wonderful thing. You are alive. The fact that you are breathing in is already a miracle. There are many people who want to breathe in but they cannot breathe in because they are already dead. We want them to breathe in but they lie there, lifeless. So to allow your body to breathe in and to become aware that you are breathing in, that you are alive, can be a source of deep happiness.

This morning I practiced like that in sitting meditation. When you breathe in, you might touch nature around you; when you breathe out, you allow yourself not to do anything, you rest completely.

[Bell]

The practice of samatha, stopping, is the practice of doing nothing—trying not to do anything, just allowing your body and your mind to rest. We know that it's not easy, because we have already a habit of running and working, both in our body and in our mind. That is why putting yourself in a Sangha where there are people who are able to stop is very important. When you come to a retreat, where there are people who have the capacity of stopping, of being there in the present moment, you can profit from their presence, their energy. They are able to be happy with the blue sky, with a little flower blooming in the grass, with each step they make. Happiness is being manufactured every moment. They don't run; they are able to stop and to live deeply every moment of their daily life. It's very important that we find ourselves among those people, because touching them, we will be able to do the same after some time.

When you are on your cushion or walking, you just practice breathing in or breathing out in order to be there, just to be there. Because your mindful presence is the agent of love and care for the pain, for the suffering in you. You have not been there for yourself. You have been running and you have neglected yourself. To be loved means to be embraced by the attention, by the energy, of the person you love. When the animal stops and lies down, it's doing that for itself. It allows itself time to rest and to heal—it is there for itself. We have to be there for ourselves. We are wounded, perhaps even deeply wounded in our body and in our soul. Who will be there for us? We have to be there for ourselves first. And the Buddha will be there for us, because the Buddha is inside of us.

To be able to establish oneself in the present moment, to know what is going on in that moment, to touch everything that is happening in that moment, is the practice. It does not require a lot of struggle; it does not require any struggle at all. Just allow yourself to be. There is a tendency to think that happiness, health, success are things you have to run to in order to get. That is why we have sacrificed the present moment. We have viewed the present moment as a means to get things in the future. That is a tendency to be stopped.

We are committed to a certain idea of happiness. We think that if we cannot realize this or that, if we cannot change

at peace with ourselves. We are trying to do something, to realize something, but maybe happiness is already there. All the conditions for you to be happy are already there. You need to recognize them. How can you recognize them if you are not there?

Maybe you have not realized that the sun in the sky is a condition for your happiness. Just take one second to look, and you see that all life on Earth is possible because of the sun. All our food comes from light, from the sun. And when you look at the sun like that, you see the sun as your father, your mother—it is nourishing you every day. The sun is always there for you. And you might complain that "nobody is taking care of me, nobody loves me, nobody pays attention to me," but the sun is one thing that is nourishing you every second of your daily life.

The earth, the trees, the water, the air, the baker, the farmer, the birds, the insects. There are those of us who have practiced stopping and dwell in the present moment, and we are able to touch the many conditions of our happiness that are available in the here and the now. We find out that we don't need more, because these conditions are more than enough to be happy. Stopping is very important. As long as you continue to run, happiness is very difficult. Stopping. Stopping allows your body and your mind to rest. Stopping allows you to recognize the conditions for your happiness that are already there.

The two elements of Buddhist meditation are stopping and looking deeply. You can only look deeply into the nature of things when they are there, when you are able to stop. Samatha is stopping, calming, and *vipasyana* is looking deeply. Sometimes you only need to stop, and suddenly a deep vision of reality will come like that. When the waves on the lake are calm, the surface of the lake is calm without waves, the full moon just reflects in the lake—the lake doesn't have to run and look for the moon. Allow yourself to be in the present moment; enjoy touching the refreshing and healing elements that are around you and within you. Whether we believe they are or are not there, they are there. Allowing yourself to touch these healing elements will allow the garbage to become compost, and the flowers to reappear in the garden of your heart.

When you are there for yourself, there is an energy that embraces you, embraces your pain, embraces your suffering, your fear, your despair. It also embraces the good, positive qualities within you. The capacity of being joyful again, of being happy again, of being loving and tolerant—these qualities are within us, and they need to be embraced in order to grow; these are flowers. And the fear, despair, and sorrow in us need to be embraced in order to become compost. They will nourish the flowers. The Buddha needs Mara in order to grow beautifully as a flower and also Mara needs the Buddha, because Mara has a certain role to play.

So suffering is very important for your happiness. You cannot understand, you cannot love, until you know what suffering is. The joy of having something to eat is possible only if you know what hunger is. In some areas of China, when people meet each other, instead of asking, "How do you do?" or "How are you?" they ask, "Have you eaten yet? Have you gotten something to eat?" Because we know there is hunger, death. So our love is expressed in a very simple way: Have you eaten yet? Have you gotten anything to eat yet?

The tendency is to want to remove and to clear away the blocks of pain and sorrow and despair in us. We just want the Buddha or God to be like a surgeon who can cut out anything we don't want of ourselves, get it out of our system. In the light of non-duality, not only are we flowers, but we are also the garbage in us. We cannot just get rid of us. Sometimes we are love, sometimes we are anger; love is us, but anger is also us. So we have to treat both love and anger on an equal basis, like the Buddha was treating Mara. Mara didn't understand. Ānanda also didn't understand. But the Buddha, he understood. He was teaching both of them the nature of non-duality between suffering and happiness.

The energy of mindfulness is the energy that allows us to be in the present moment, to embrace ourselves, our suffering, our despair, our sorrow; and also the seeds of joy and peace and love that have become weak in us because we have not been able to water and cultivate these seeds to help them to be stronger. So the practice is the practice of embracing, and it is clear that the energy with which you can embrace yourself is the energy of mindfulness. "Darling, I am there for you." When we love someone we want to make such a declaration, "Darling I am there for you." And you have to be really there for her. Your presence is the greatest gift you can make to the person you love. To be there, it's not easy. You have to be there with one hundred per cent of yourself. You have to be really mindful, with all your attention. That energy has the power of healing and of making the other person happy. In this case it is self-love, and we all know that the love we have for another depends on our self-love. If we

care of the other person. So the object of love is our self-first—our body and our consciousness. Embracing yourself in the present moment is the practice.

By being there entirely, you recognize that not only suffering is there, something else is there—the wonders of life, the refreshing and healing elements from within and around and you may like to practice touching them. Look at the sky; listen to the rain, smile to it. It's wonderful that it's raining; it's wonderful that the sky is blue this morning; it's wonderful that I am here, alive. It's wonderful that I can walk; it's wonderful that my heart still functions normally. There are so many things you can enjoy. When one tree in the garden dies you may forget that all the other trees are still alive. You let your sorrow dominate, and suddenly you lose everything. When a tree is dying in my garden, yes, I know it, but there are other trees that are still green, healthy. If you remember that, you will not be drowned by your sorrow, and you will have enough strength to save the tree that is dying or replace it with another tree.

Make your heart large so that you may be able to see that the conditions for your happiness are there, and injustice, cruelty, or meanness is not enough to ruin your life. You can accept it easily, because your heart is large, and you can receive it without resentment and anger. It's like when you throw some dirt into the river, the river would not be angry. The river is willing to accept that dirt, and it can transform that dirt overnight. There's so much water in the river, so much mud in the water that the amount of dirt that you throw into the river will be transformed overnight. If you throw that dirt into a container of water in your home that would not be the same thing. You know that the water in the container will no longer be drinkable; you have to throw it away. But when you throw that amount of dirt into the river, people from the city still continue to drink the water from the river because it's large. The river has the capacity of transforming and healing. So practice being like a river, that is what the Buddha recommended to us.

Practice being like the earth. Whether people throw on earth flowers, perfumes, rice, curries or they throw on it urine, excrement, the earth will be willing to accept all without any resentment, because earth is large and earth has the power to transform. And earth is always there for us. So the Buddha told Rahula, "My dear, practice like earth, practice like water in the river and you will not suffer because your heart is big."

So coming back to embrace ourselves, to start the process of healing, to touch the positive elements does not seem to be a difficult practice. You only need a Sangha where there are people who are doing that and who enjoy just doing that. When you come to the Meditation Hall and sit down holding your plate of food, you may do it with a lot of pleasure. Don't think of it as a hard practice. Yes, we don't talk during the whole meal, you sit quiet in an erect position during the whole meal. Yes, we do that. But many of us enjoy doing that. We don't have to talk, we don't have to think, we don't have to do anything: we just realize complete rest during the whole meal. To be able to share a meal with a Sangha in mindfulness, not to have to do anything at all, to just enjoy every morsel of your food, touching your food deeply without any thinking, without making any project in your mind is the practice, the practice of stopping and resting.

You may think that it's oppressive not to talk. It's difficult to stay in a sitting position like this for one hour, but that is because you are so used to running and to doing movements. But to allow yourself to sit for one hour, not **(indiscernible words)** enjoy our upright position, enjoy our in-breath and our out-breath, not to think of anything, just enjoy. Because being there sitting, not doing anything is a very nice thing to do, and just to be aware of our in-breath and our out-breath, and just to relax the muscles on our face, our body, is a nice thing to do.

When you pick up a piece of string bean, look at it, smile, and call it by its true name, "string bean." And you realize with some mindfulness and concentration that the piece of string bean is a wonder of life, exactly like you—you are a wonder of life, you are a miracle. The piece of string bean has been made by clouds, sunshine, the earth, the minerals, the air, the water, everything. This piece of string bean is really an ambassador coming to you from the cosmos if you know how to receive it, how to be with it, how to chew it mindfully and joyfully. Eating a piece of string bean may give joy. What is the use of eating a piece of string bean? To get nutrition? No, you just enjoy the piece of string bean, you enjoy yourself, the presence of the bean, you enjoy the moment, being with yourself and with the Sangha.

We like to chew our food thirty times, forty times, fifty times. During that time we don't chew anything else, we don't chew our projects, our sorrow, our anxiety. Allow it to sleep, you are embracing it now by the practice of being

movements. But they are only the habits; you have to learn the habit of resting, it's very important.

Sitting on your cushion during sitting meditation is also practicing resting, and practicing walking meditation, just touching the earth and realizing the wonder of being alive and walking on the earth, this is also the practice of resting. In every moment you allow yourself to be there and to take care of your sorrow, your anxiety, your pain. They may be sleeping quietly down there in the bottom of your consciousness, or they may be emerging on the surface. In any case, embrace them; embrace them with your true presence, because the energy of mindfulness is the energy of being there for you, for the people you love. The sun is there for you, the moon is there for you, the trees are there for you, the water is there for you, and you should be there for them also, especially for yourself. You are the person who needs you the most. Call your name, call your name in silence—that person has suffered, that person needs you desperately, you should go back and embrace her, embrace him.

[Bell]

Now let us do a meditation exercise. Let us visualize ourselves as young people who are caught in a situation of drugs. There are so many young people who are addicted to drugs in Europe, in America, everywhere. This is a big problem of the twentieth century, and we don't know whether we will be able to solve it during the first half of the twenty-first century. This is some garbage that needs to be taken care of. Who are these young people who every day seek desperately to have some money to buy some drugs? Even if you know how to get some drugs, you don't know how to get the money. You may have tried to steal the money from your parents, which is safer than stealing from other people.

There are so many of us who suffer in Europe, in Asia, in America. We are suffering, we are despair, we are sorrow, we need to be embraced. We are the garbage of humanity. We want to go back to being flowers. Who will help us? What kind of presence could be given to us? We suffer; we don't need suppression, we don't need the army, we don't need the police. We really need a kind of presence that helps us to transform, because we don't want to be in this position. But we are in this position, a position where we have to seek every day a means to get some drugs. Where is humanity? Who can help us? Who can manifest their true presence in order to embrace us? Who knows that we are suffering? They think that we only need punishment. They don't know how difficult it is for us to get out of our situation.

The energy that we need is enlightenment, is mindfulness. We need people to know that we suffer, that we don't want to be like this for a long time, because maybe tomorrow it will be too difficult for us to continue and we may have to kill ourselves. So we need desperately some kind of presence that tells us they know that we are there, we suffer and they are there for us. Who are they? People in the church, they don't really want to do something to help us. Our parents, what have they done for us to be like we are today? It's not because we just want to be addicted to drugs, it's because we have suffered so much. We feel wounded, we feel no way out, that we have to look for some drugs to be able to forget our situation.

The people in the Church don't seem to understand us. There may be nice people in the Church, they may want to do something, but in a majority of the cases they are preaching to us a kind of teaching that cannot respond to our real need. They are trying to impose on us the kind of life that does not seem to fit us. Understanding and compassion does not seem to come from the direction of the Church. We have practiced and our teacher says that we have to go back to our spiritual roots. We have tried. We had to start, we have started to going back to Mass but still, they are still narrow-minded. They don't know what our suffering is.

Our parents, they don't seem to be happy with each other. They make each other suffer. They created hell in our family. We have not been able to see happiness in the family. We have not experienced harmony, compassion and love in our family life. They don't seem to understand us. They don't seem to love us. How could love be possible without understanding? We don't see anything beautiful in this life. Everything is ugly. We don't see anything meaningful in this life. We don't see anything true in this life everything seems to be fake. So we are hungry ghosts, looking for something meaningful and true. Since we have not found anything, we have to forget we are there and drugs seem to be the only thing for us. This is a block of garbage produced collectively during the twentieth century.

Meditation on this scale means to produce a presence of enlightened people—governmental people, doctors, psychotherapists, educators, artists and so on. We have to come as a group, as a Sangha, to produce our true presence. "Dear people, we know that you are there, we know that you suffer, that is why we have come to you and

better; we want to love you." That is the presence they need: that is collective meditation. Maybe in coming together our insight will be deep enough to provide these people with a positive environment for their healing and their liberation—a healing center, rehabilitation center, where these young people can get the minimum dose of drugs they need every day so that they don't have to go and kill or steal in order to get the drugs. Where they can be taken good care of, and get help in order to reduce the amount of drugs and start the process of healing, touching the things that surround us that are healthy, that are refreshing.

If those of us who are doctors, governmental people, artists, psychotherapists don't practice for ourselves, we won't have insight and compassion and understanding; how can we help take care of the garbage we have produced? Who is responsible for producing this garbage? All of us. Blaming other people will not help, especially blaming the victims. We have to realize that they are us, we are them, that our life is made of flowers and garbage at the same time. We have to accept both and to take care of both in the best way that we can, with the understanding, the calm, provided by our practice.

The government of Holland has tried to do things, the government of France, of Spain, many governments; the government of the United States of America also has tried many ways to help. But where are we? Haven't we realized that we are responsible for the production of the garbage? Our society is produced in such a way that we create hungry ghosts very young, every day, by the thousands, by the hundreds of thousands. They are everywhere, wandering around without anything to believe in, without anything to love, without anything that looks true and good and beautiful.

I don't know whether during the first half of the twenty-first century we can handle this problem of drugs, of the hungry ghosts that we produce. We have to call on people in all walks of life—parents, Church, teachers, businessmen and others—to stop and look. This is very important, stopping and looking at our present situation and considering how to start transforming garbage into flowers. We have to organize Dharma discussions on a very big scale. We have to organize it in our family, we have to organize it in our city, we have to make it into a national debate where people may have a say, where each person makes a contribution of his or her insight. That is a matter for all of us, that is meditation.

As individuals we have problems; but we also have problems as families, as cities, as nations, and meditation in the twenty-first century should be a collective practice. Without a Sangha we cannot achieve much. When we focus our attention on suffering, on the garbage on a larger scale, maybe the little problems that we have within our individual circle will vanish, because by practicing being there we begin to connect with, to relate to, other people who are also ourselves. That way our loneliness, our feeling of being cut off, will no longer be there, and we will be able to do things together. Like when we come to Plum Village, we try to be part of the Sangha, we practice as a Sangha. It's much easier, and transformation will take place much more quickly if you don't just practice as individuals. When I practice walking I make mindful and beautiful steps. I know that I do that not only for myself, but also for all of my friends who are here; because everyone, who sees me taking a step like that has confidence and is reminded to do the same. And when they make a step in the present moment, smiling and making peace with themselves, they inspire us all, they are doing that for all of us. You breathe for me, I walk for you, we do things together and this is practicing as a Sangha.

So today please enjoy your walking if it doesn't rain. If it rains, you enjoy the rain. We also have a formal meal together. A formal meal is a time when we sit together as a Sangha, we enjoy the collective energy of mindfulness, and each of us allows the mindful energy of the Sangha to penetrate in. Even if you don't do anything, just stop thinking and allow yourself to absorb the collective energy of the Sangha. It's very healing. Don't struggle, don't try to do something. Allow yourself to rest, and the energy of the Sangha will help. Eat your meal very slowly, mindfully; enjoy every morsel of food. That is the most important thing to do during eating, just enjoy every morsel of food, chew it carefully and slowly. That allows the pain, the sorrow in us to be embraced.

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# The Nature of Self

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Good morning, my dear friends, my dear Sangha. Today is the 21<sup>st</sup> of July, 1998, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. I would like to tell you the story of Blanche. Her Vietnamese name is to, which means, "white," and today we call her Blanche. Blanche was a little blind girl who lived with her father and her mother in a little house, at the foot of a mountain where there was a large forest. Her father was a very loving father, and he had made her a flute from bamboo. Blanche played the flute very well. She was a very talented young girl, and she had discovered how to play the flute by herself. Before she was blind, she did not play every day, but after she became blind she would go to the forest and play every afternoon.

Blanche was blind because of a chemical that was sprayed on the mountains and the forests in Vietnam, during the war. Guerrillas hid themselves in the jungle and on the mountains, and the pilots could not see them; therefore they flew airplanes over the mountains and the jungle to spray the forest with Agent Orange. After a week all the leaves would fall, and the trees become bare, then the movement of troops could be seen from an airplane, in order to bomb and kill the enemies. And one day when Blanche was playing her flute in the forest, an airplane came and sprayed the chemical, and it fell on her, and that is how she became blind.

One day she heard that her father died as a soldier in a battle. She could not believe it. How could a person die? She didn't know what death was, except that one day she had seen a little bird dead, close to her house, and no matter what she had done the little bird could not be revived. She was not going to see her father again, because her father was like the dead bird. So she lived only with her mother. When she heard that her father had died, she was very sad; and that was why she played the flute every day, in order to relieve her sorrow. She was crying, and telling every one, every tree, every cloud, every insect in the forest of her pain and her suffering, and that is how she got relief. Playing flute was her every day practice to gain more peace, more calm and so on. No one could help her, except the flute. Her mother had to cut wood, and transport it to the nearby market to sell, so that she could buy the things she needed. Blanche used to accompany her to the market, pulling the wooden cart, so that her mother wouldn't have to push too hard. After she became blind, she was still able to help her, and she went with her mother to the market to sell wood. Her mother always bought something in the market for her to eat before they went home, a cake wrapped in banana leaves, or something like that.

One day when Blanche was playing the flute in the forest, she heard someone approaching. She stopped playing, and asked, "Who's there?" There was no answer, and she asked again, "Who's there? What is your name?" There was still no answer, but she knew that there was some one very close to her. Finally, she heard someone walking close to her, and then someone began to speak in a very funny way—it seemed that that someone did not know how to speak. "My...my...my name is...Peter." It was a little boy about eleven or twelve. His Vietnamese name is Thach Lang; translated into English, that is "Stone Boy," and that is why I use the name Peter, because Peter or Pierre also means "stone boy."

"Where did you come from? How old are you?" She kept asking him that question. When she had heard a few words from Peter she knew already that this was a young person, a boy. Although she could not see, her way of listening was wonderful and she could already visualize the young man. He was very silent. He tried to say something, but it seemed as though he did not know how to speak the human language. Finally he could say that his name was Peter, and that he came from the top of a mountain very far away. That is all the information she got. She said, "Come over here," with a lot of authority. So Peter came, and Blanche used her ten fingers in order to explore his face. She smiled. "I was right, you are twelve years old, and your face is in the shape of a mango." In fact, his

face was in the shape of a mango. They became friends very quickly. Amazingly, during one hour of sitting and chatting together, he learned a lot of words, and they began to speak to each other. He began to tell her what was around them, the kinds of trees, and the colors of the trees, the colors of the leaves, the colors of the trunks. At that time the trees were beginning to grow new leaves.

Blanche invited Peter to her home, and they were given dinner by her mother. This was the first time that Blanche had had a guest in her house, and this boy was a wonderful boy. He did not say much, and it was very difficult to get information about where he had come from, who his father and mother were. Blanche's mother was very careful, because she did not want to touch the seed of suffering in anyone—maybe the father of the boy had already died in battle, maybe his mother was sick—so she was very careful not to ask too many questions. Blanche also learned the way of her mother, and she stopped asking questions. But they continued to talk, and after dinner they went out and played near the brook, and she asked him to tell her what he saw around him. Because of that exercise he continued to learn how to say things.

Peter stayed many days in that home, and became a real brother to Blanche. They were very happy as friends, and he learned to call the mother of Blanche "Mommy." So the two children helped Blanche's mother to put the logs on the cart, and they helped her to pull and to push the cart to the market. During the trip Peter continued to describe to Blanche everything that he saw around. At one time she said, "Peter, you are my eyes. With you around I am no longer blind. It is wonderful to have you with me. Don't leave me, because as long as you are close to me, I don't have the impression that I'm a blind girl any more. " She was very happy.

But something awful happened during that day. There was fighting breaking out in the market, there was bombing, there was shooting, there was burning of the houses, and the two children lost their mother. She was going to a shop to buy some kerosene for the lamp, but because of the fighting she got lost. And they did not know whether she died or whether she was kidnapped by someone. After waiting and waiting until the sun was about to set, they decided to go home and take refuge in their home. They cried a lot, especially Blanche, and on day Peter proposed that they set out on a journey to find the mother who had been lost. Both of them believed very strongly that if they could find the mother, then everything would be fine again. Remember, that is what they believed: if we are able to find our mother again, then everything will be alright again—there will be no war, there will no fighting, there will be no chemical poisons, and everything will be fine again. That was their strong belief. Blanche believed that when her mother gave her birth, that she also gave birth to the mountains and rivers around her, and the birds, the fish, the streams, and everything. She believed her mother to be someone who could create her and create the cosmos around her, and that if something was wrong; it was because they had lost their mother. If they were able to find their mother again, then everything will be fine again. So the purpose of the two children was to find Mother. I think all us believe the same thing; we are still trying to find our mother.

(Bell)

I know something about Peter. That day, sitting on the top of the mountain, he heard the sound of the flute. Someone was playing the flute down there, at the foot of the mountain, and the sound of the flute was wonderful. The music spoke a lot to him, and suddenly he was born. Alone, he tried to find his way down from the top of the mountain to see who was playing the flute, and finally he discovered Blanche, sitting at the foot of a tree and playing. That afternoon they met each other and became friends, became something like brother and sister to each other. Blanche had the talent of playing the flute, and Peter had the talent of singing. We don't know how he learned to sing like that, so that every time he sang he was able to make the sky and the earth quiet. He could even make the fighting quiet. He just sat down very quietly with solidity and freedom, and raised his voice to sing. A storm could be dissipated by his singing. While he was singing, many birds would come from many directions and circle around, over his head. That happened always, every time Peter started singing.

During the battle when the children lost their mother, it was awful—they heard the cry of children and adults dying or being wounded, they heard the sounds of the houses burning, they heard the shouting, the fighting--and suddenly Peter sat up. It is very dangerous to sit up or stand up during a bombing, because the bombs could kill you. The safest way is to lie down flat every time there is shooting or bombing going on. All the children in Vietnam knew that: every time there was fighting and shooting you had to get flat. Blanche was very used to that, and she pulled Peter down and got him to lie very still. But at one point Peter would not obey her any more, because it was very oppressive—the war, the fighting, the crying, the shouting—that is why he sat up and began to sing. And as his

lot of birds came and circled around their heads, and finally the fighting died down and the soldiers left. The people in the village began to come out and help the people who were wounded in the fighting and bombing. Now, Blanche was able to sit up, and both children began to inquire about their mother, only to find that she was not there. They spent many hours looking and asking neighbors, but no one saw her, and so they went home. A number of days later they decided to go on a long, long trip to look for their mother. Don't think this is someone else's story, because this is my story, and it is your story also. All of us are trying to find our real mother, our common mother.

Blanche and Peter went through many dangers. This story is very long, and this morning I am only telling you some of it. Both children got arrested, because the police suspected them of being "liaison children," children who could bring information to the guerrillas. So they were both arrested, and Blanche was put into a school for blind children. After some months in prison, Peter was sent to a school of young army officers, a school for boys whose fathers had already died in battle. Peter was brought to that school, and he had to follow the military discipline, like all the other boys. You know, Blanche and Peter were both artists, and so they suffered very much from that kind of discipline, and they were separated.

One day Peter talked to his friends in the school, and he described the suffering that the children in the country were experiencing. They came together and decided to ask their teachers and the administration of the school, instead of teaching fighting, to teach the children the way to love each other, the way to bring peace and harmony into the school and into society. They dared to come to the teachers and the members of the school administration and to ask them not to teach them how to kill, how to fire guns any more, but teach them something that is more helpful. Because of that action they were arrested, they were not allowed to be students in the school any more, and Peter was locked into the prison with other prisoners, although he was only twelve or thirteen years old.

In prison, Peter met a very strange monk. That monk was in prison too, because he was trying to do something for peace. His name is funny--his name is "the Coconut Monk." I personally have met the Coconut Monk. When he was a young man he went to France and studied engineering, but when he went back to Vietnam, he did not like being an engineer anymore. He wanted to become a monk, and he practiced a lot of sitting meditation. He liked to sit where the atmosphere was calm and fresh, so he climbed up in a coconut tree and built a platform up there, and he sat in meditation up there. That is why people called him the Coconut Monk. I think the son of the American writer John Steinbeck also went to Vietnam, and he had the chance to spend a few months living with the Coconut Monk.

I knew the Coconut Monk. He was doing something that people considered crazy, but he was a real, good monk. He tried to stop the war in his own way. He went to collect pieces of bombs and bullets, and he melted them to make a mindfulness bell. Every night he would invite the bell to sound, and he would chant the name of the Buddha and Avalokitesvara. He told the pieces of metal that he collected, "You have been playing the game of war. Now I would like to help you practice. I am going to transform you into a bell of mindfulness, so that you become enlightened and become a bodhisattva trying to enlighten the people in this country who are sleepy, with brothers fighting and killing each other in a very stupid way." He asked friends to come every night, and he invited the bell to sound, as everyone was breathing in and out and transforming themselves into peaceful people, and not fighters anymore.

One day he went to the Presidential Palace, and he wanted to have an interview with the President of South Vietnam. With him he had a wooden house, with a cat and mouse living inside together. I don't know how he educated the cat and the mouse, but they co-existed. He gave the mouse things to eat, and the cat things to eat, and neither ate each other. (Laughter.) He wanted to make a declaration: "You see, even the mouse and the cat can co-exist, so why cannot we co-exist with each other as human beings? If I can make the cat and the mouse live together, how is that we human beings cannot live together in peace? Why do we have to fight each other like that? But they still considered him to be a mentally ill person, and they did not allow him to come in and meet the President. He appeared to be a disturbed person, but in fact he had a lot of wisdom. His name, again, was the Coconut Monk. Nguyen Thanh Minh was his "identity name," but people knew him as the Coconut Monk. So Peter saw him and quickly became friends with him in prison.

You know that Peter was a kind of Coconut Monk, too. He did not like the war, he wanted to end the war and bring peace to his people. His purpose was to find his mother, so that everything would be all right again. Because he was collaborating with prisoners in asking for the end of the war, he continued to get into trouble. At that time, not only was the Coconut Monk in prison; there were also other monks in prison. Peter was transferred to another prison where he met three hundred monks, who were in prison because they refused to be drafted into the army. When



fighting. Many, many people joined the monks in a fast, and everywhere that Peter went he created a movement like that, so that he was described by the administration of the prison as a troublemaker. Finally, they could bear it any more, and they wanted to push Peter to the frontier, to North Vietnam, because he was in the south. There was a little bridge connecting one side of the river to the other, in the Demilitarized Zone, and the name of the river was the Ben Hai. They could not handle Peter, a twelve-year-old boy, so they wanted to expel him to North Vietnam.

In North Vietnam, many people welcomed him, and asked him about the situation in the south. He told people very honestly about the situation in the south, but they wanted to make him into an instrument of propaganda, telling only evil things about the south, and saying good things about the north. But he refused. Everywhere he went he always told the truth: that no one wanted the war, that everyone wanted peace. So the government of North Vietnam did not like him either, and he was exiled to a mountainous area where he had to cut trees and carry bamboo sticks, and he was always watched by a soldier.

One day he was working hard on a mountain, cutting bamboo trees, when he suddenly missed Blanche too much. He saw that the soldier, his guard, was there, and he sat down and began to sing. As he started to sing, all the birds in the area came and circled around him. The soldier was very surprised to see that, and Peter just walked away. He got out of the mountains, and tried to find a way down to the south, to meet Blanche.

Blanche had been living for more than six months in the school for the blind children. That night, Blanche could not sleep. She did not know why she could not sleep. The moon was very bright outside. She could not see the moonlight, yet she knew that the moon was there, and that outside everything was very alive. In the dark she found her flute, and she went out to sit in nature, and she began to play the flute. The sound of the flute guided Peter, so that he could find her, and they met each other again. When Peter recognized Blanche playing the flute, he came close to her, he took her in his arms, and he proposed that they get away from the school for the blind and go back to the mountain where they could find their thatched house again.

It was midnight, but with Peter beside Blanche, there was no danger. The children found their way out of the city, and they began to walk to the highlands, where they went in the direction of the mountain they had originally come from. When they arrived many days later at the thatched house, they did not see Mother. She was still lost, and had not been able to find her way home to the children. So Peter decided to invite Blanche to go to the top of the mountain where he originated. Blanche had never asked him who his mother and father were, and Peter himself did not know how he was born, or who his parents were. Because Blanche was blind, climbing the mountain took a long time. With Peter's help, Blanche took step after step, in order to climb the mountain, and finally they arrived at the top about 8:00 p.m., when it had already begun to get dark. Of course, Blanche did not see anything. Peter remembered that on top of the mountain there was a very beautiful rock, and in the rock there was a hollow that was as big as a grapefruit. Every night the dew would come and collect in that hollow, and Peter remembered that every time he drank the dew from that hollow he had gotten a lot of energy and happiness. He believed that if he could give that water to Blanche to drink, and if he could use some of it to wash her eyes, that she would recover her eyesight again. He had that conviction. That is why he had invited Blanche to come with him to the very top of the mountain.

When they arrived, it was about eight o'clock in the evening, and they were both very tired. Peter helped Blanche to lie down to sleep. They had a conversation before they slept, and he said that at midnight, when the dew began to fill up the hollow in the rock, he would wake her up so she could drink the water, and so he could use the water to wash her eyes, so that her sight could be restored. Blanche followed his advice, and lay down. Peter used his overcoat as a blanket, and put it on Blanche so that she could sleep. At midnight he woke her up, and helped her to climb up a few meters more, so she could reach the highest point of the mountain, the beautiful rock.

Imagine...it was a full moon night, the full moon night of the fourth month of the lunar calendar. You know, that was the night that the Buddha was born: the full moon night of the fourth night of the lunar calendar. It was exactly that night. So when they arrived at the top of the mountain, Peter used his hands to make a cup for the water, so Blanche could drink. Blanche felt that the atmosphere was very still, very sacred. Suddenly she felt that it was safer for her to kneel down in order to receive the wonderful water, so she knelt down and put her hands in the form of a lotus. By that time, Peter had taken water in his palms, and he gave it to her to drink. She knelt there in a very respectful way, and drank, little by little, that dew, that wonderful water, given to her by Peter. And as she continued to drink, she felt a new source of energy born in her. She felt very refreshed, very joyful. Finally, Peter used that

water to wash her eyes three times, very carefully. After that he helped her to go back to the flat rock, and asked her to lie down and continue her sleep. He said, "Go to sleep my sister. I will also go to sleep with you. I will not be far from you. I will stay here and lie down and sleep also, very soon."

Blanche had a very deep and restoring sleep that night. In the morning, when she woke up, she was very surprised to have a very strange feeling. Suddenly she brought her hands to her eyes, because the light was so strong. She did not know that she had recovered her eyesight. She was so surprised when she woke up and had to bring both her hands up to hide her eyes from the light. Very slowly she began to peer through her fingers...and she saw the blue sky for the first time, after so long. And she knew that she had recovered her sight because of the wondrous dew that Peter had used to wash her eyes. She slowly sat up and looked around. It was wonderful. It was the top of the mountain. All around her were the clouds and the dew and the mist covering everything, and she had the impression that she was on an island, completely separated from the world of suffering, war and destruction. It was like heaven. She was like a completely new person, and she was so glad. She was completely healed, she was a new being, and she was so happy. And then she began to think of Peter, and she began to call his name: "Peter! Peter!" and her voice echoed back to her. She heard no response from Peter, and she began to panic. Peter was no longer there.

Suddenly Blanche looked up and saw the stone. The stone was in the shape of a young boy, and it was exactly the shape of Peter. And she suddenly remembered what Peter told her at the foot of the mountain. Peter had said, "My sister, you asked me how I have learned to sing. I don't know. But I was on the top of the mountain for many, many years...I don't know how many years I was on the top of the mountain. I had the opportunity to listen to the wind, the rain, and the birds for I don't know how many millions of years, and suddenly I knew how to sing."

Peter may be a human being, but he may be something else – something more than a human being. Now Blanche saw Peter as a rock, and she believed that initially he was a rock, sitting on top of the mountain for many millions of years, until suddenly one day he heard the sound of the flute coming from the foot of the mountain. Peter had transformed himself into a little boy, and found his way out to see who was playing the flute. At that time, Peter had vowed to become Blanche's eyes. She remembered one day when she had said to Peter: "Peter, do you know that you are my eyes? With you around, I am no longer a blind person." All these kinds of memories came back to her, and suddenly she began to understand that Peter was her eyes. Peter would never disappear; he would always be there, because now she would always be able to see things again. Peter had not left her. Before that she could not bear it; she had cried, and she had pounded her chest, because there was a lot of attachment in her. She had wanted to be blind again so that Peter would appear to her again. But now, she was enlightened. She saw that now Peter was in her, in the form of eyes, and wherever she went, Peter would be with her. With that kind of understanding and enlightenment, the sorrow in her began to disappear, and she picked up her flute and began to play. And you know something? The flute now expressed her insight, and the clouds and the mist and the blue sky and the rock and the mountains and the trees all stopped, and listened deeply to the sound of her flute.

(Bell)

If you have eyes capable of seeing things around you, you know that Peter is always alive in you. The Buddha is someone who has wisdom, who has eyes capable of seeing things as they are. Many of us are blind because we are not capable of seeing things. We live in ignorance, we live in the dark, and we don't know where to go. We don't know how to rediscover our mothers. That is why we need the Buddha so much. The Buddha appears to us like a brother, and he serves as our eyes. Let us not try to find the Buddha in another person, let us try to find the Buddha within ourselves. We have the capacity of looking deeply in order to see the true nature of things, and if we have eyes capable of seeing things as they are, the Buddha is always with us.

I gave that story to a friend to read, and after reading it he said, "Peter is Jesus Christ." I said, "That is true." Jesus Christ is not an entity that you have to look for outside yourself; Jesus Christ is within you. He is the eyes that we need not to be blind any more. Our practice is always to get out of our blindness, to have the kind of eyes that can see things as they are. We know that Peter has not left us at any moment, because he is always in our hearts. If we know how to live mindfully, Peter is always there every moment in our daily lives.

Today the children may like to draw a picture with Blanche, the little girl, and with Peter. And after you have painted or drawn the two children, make another drawing, and this time draw just one person, and in that person you can see both Blanche and Peter at the same time. So, happy practice today. When you hear the bell, you stand up

bow to the Sangha, and you go out for continued practice.

Dear friends, there is always a better way to practice listening to the bell. When you listen to the bell you may like to allow all your ancestors to listen at the same time. Because all our ancestors are still alive within us, and they are there in every cell of our body. You invite your ancestors to listen to the bell with you; the bell is a voice calling you back to the here and the now, for you to become fully alive again. The sound, first of all, seems to be something outside of you, but if you listen that way, the sound is coming from deep within...the voice of the Buddha inside, calling you back to the safe island of self, and the voice of your ancestors calling you back to life. That is why the sound of the bell is neither outside nor inside, because the reality transcends notions of outside or inside. You can listen deeply, better than when you first began the practice. Allow every cell in your body to open up, so that the sound of the bell can penetrate deep into each cell of your body, or in a different way you can say that you open every cell up so that the sound can come out of it. Your ancestors, whether blood ancestors or spiritual ancestors, are there, present in every cell of your body, and the sound of the bell might come from there or from outside--it does not matter. But to listen to the calling, and to go back to life, to be awake, to be alive, to be in the present moment, is our practice.

Maybe many of our ancestors did not have the chance to practice listening to the bell, and to become fully alive and present in the here and the now, and now you are doing it for them. And suddenly, just by taking one in-breath, you make all your ancestors fully alive at the same time. This is what we can do. Among us there are those who can do it. They sit there with you, they listen to the same sound of the bell, but they can go very deep, they can go very high. So it depends on your insight, your visualization, your concentration, whether the effect of the sound of the bell is deep or not deep enough. Every time you walk, you do the same. You are not a separate entity, and you know that you can walk in such a way that all your ancestors can make the same steps with you, at the same time. When you take a step, your mother also takes a step, your father, your grandmother, your grandfather, and all your ancestors, are taking a step, and the Buddha walks with you, taking that very step with you. Peter is always there. Peter is walking with you at every moment, and walking like that is to liberate yourself from the prison of sorrow that you have locked yourself into. Walking like that can be very liberating. If you walk like that you don't walk just as a separate individual. You walk in such a way that all your ancestors, blood and spiritual, walk with you. You know that you carry within you all generations of ancestors, and more than that, you carry within you all future generations. Even if you are still very young, your children are already there within yourself, and their children are already there within you. So make a step for all of them, liberate them, liberate our ancestors, and liberate the future generations, by just making one step. And if you can make such a step, you can make two, and you can make three. The practice can go very, very deep.

I would like to share with you a poem that I have been using for eight years now, but it is not available in English or in French. Among you there are poets and composers...I hope you can make it into a piece of music to help with your practice.

Thay recites a poem, consisting of two four-line stanzas.)

Eating in the ultimate dimension,

This is for you to practice during lunchtime. Today you have a formal lunch.

Eating in the ultimate dimension—because there are two dimensions to reality. The first dimension is called the historical dimension. In this dimension of reality you can see the beginning and the ending, the inside and the outside, birth and death, more or less, the coming and the going. It is the dimension of the waves, because looking at each wave you have the impression that there is a beginning to every wave, an ending to every wave, the being and the non-being of the wave. First we think that there was the non-being of the wave, and suddenly there is the being of the wave. And after that there is again the non-being of the wave. So in that historical dimension it seems that all these things exist: being, non-being, beginning, ending, high or low, more or less beautiful, and so on. These kinds of ideas create a lot of suffering and despair and jealousy and anger. So when you are in the historical dimension, please be very careful not to be caught by it.

Then there is another dimension called the ultimate dimension. This ultimate dimension is not separate from the historical dimension. In the case of the wave, it is water, because water cannot be separated from waves; but when you touch water, you don't see a beginning, an ending, high or low, being or non-being--these notions that we use to

live the life of water at the same time. So when you live in your historical dimension, you should train yourself touch and to live the ultimate dimension at the same time. That is our practice: be the wave...okay, but you have to be the water. If you are to become stable, free, if you want to have the elements of non-fear and non-discrimination within you, then touching the ultimate dimension is a necessary practice.

A wave can be subject to fear, to jealousy, to discrimination, if she lives very superficially in the historical dimension. She sees that there is a beginning to her life, an end to her life, she sees that she is not the other waves, that she is more or less beautiful than the other waves, that she is struggling with the other waves, and that she suffers quite a lot. But if she bends down and touches the nature of water within her, she sees that she is in the other waves, the other waves are in her, and there is really no beginning and no end, and because of that she gets out of fear, and discrimination and jealousy. So touching the historical dimension deeply, you touch the ultimate dimension. And when you are able to touch the ultimate dimension, all discrimination and fear vanish, and you get the real peace that you deserve.

When you listen to the bell, you can try to listen to the bell in the ultimate dimension, in order to realize that the bell is always there—it's not because the sister uses a stick and makes contact that the sound is born. The sound is always there. The nature of the sound is no-birth and no-death, always existing. You also share the same nature. Your true nature is the nature of no birth, no death, no beginning, and no end. Unless you touch your true nature of no-birth, no death, you cannot obtain that kind of insight, the insight of no-birth and no-death that will bring to you the element of non-fear, non-discrimination. If you continue to be the victim of discrimination and fear, then suffering is going to continue for a long time. The greatest relief is to be obtained only when you are capable of touching the ultimate dimension. In touching the ultimate dimension, you don't have to reach out. A wave doesn't have to reach out in order to touch water, because she is water. Peter is within you; Peter is not a separate identity. While living every moment of your daily life, learn how to touch Peter in you. The nature of Peter is the nature of no-birth and no-death, no coming and no going, and you share the same nature with Peter.

Eating in the ultimate dimension, I nourish all my ancestors. I keep my ancestors alive, because every spoonful that you take is to nourish you, of course, but it is also to keep all your ancestors alive at the same time. By feeding yourself you are feeding all your ancestors, and also your children and their children. Taking one spoonful of food, you know that you are feeding all your ancestors and your children and grandchildren. It is just like walking. All my ancestors walk with me.

When you are in your sitting position, and enjoying breathing in and breathing out, try breathing for your mother, your father, your grandpa, your grandma, or anyone. This is very pleasant to practice. Pick someone, call his or her name: "Mother, please breathe with me." And that is not visualization that is the truth. When you breathe, your mother in you breathes also. When you were a tiny living being in the womb of your mother, every time your mother breathed in, you breathed in; every time your mother ate, you ate. The same thing happens now, every time you breathe in, your mother breathes in, your ancestors breathe in, and your child who is already there, or who is to manifest later, they are all breathing in with you. That is the way to breathe in order to touch the nature of no self. People talk a lot about no self, but they don't know exactly what it is. Here we are not talking about no self, we are living the reality of non-self. When you breathe, you breathe for all your ancestors and your children.

Every thing you do, you do not for yourself alone, you do for us all. And walking like that, breathing like that, listening like that, you are touching the nature of no self. And when you touch the nature of no self, you touch the ultimate dimension. There is no "I," there is no "you," because I am in you, and you are in me. We inter-are. That is not only true with Peter and Blanche, but it is true of everyone else.

Eating in the ultimate dimension, you maintain alive all the generations of ancestors.

You allow, you help coming generations to find a way to go up.

"To go up," means to transcend suffering, to transcend discrimination, to liberate ourselves, our situation and society. We are still caught up with many negative things: discrimination, violence, hatred and so on. So eat in such a way that you can open the way for future generations to transcend all these negative things.

When I sit with you and I eat my meal, I practice that. I chew with these words: I touch deeply the food, I touch deeply the Sangha embracing me, the Sangha in which I take refuge; I allow my ancestors to eat, my children and

are the first four lines. The next four lines: eating in the ultimate dimension, you chew in the same way that you breathe, with real rhythm.

You chew and you are aware of what you are chewing. You are aware of the food in your mouth. You chew, and you touch the very nature of the food in your mouth. Eating mindfully is to be aware of what you are eating. If you are mindful, then you can discover the true nature of the food, which is also the nature of inter-being.

Yesterday I talked about the milk we drink every morning. Drinking the milk, you know that it is not only sweet, but that it is also somehow bitter, because of the way we raise the cows, we treat the calves, and so on. We can be aware, when we chew the food, or when we look deeply into the food: we can see the ingredients, the elements that have come together to produce that food. A piece of carrot, a piece of string bean, a piece of tofu, a grain of rice, all these things contain the whole universe, and if you look deeply, you can see the lives of other living beings in it. You can see the compost; you can even see the dry bones of other living beings in the refreshing piece of tofu. A piece of tofu is not only vegetarian. The dry bones of tiny living beings have become compost, and the grain of rice, the piece of tofu, the piece of string bean, contain all of that: the sunshine, the wind, the clouds. Vegetarian and non-vegetarian, all that is inside each piece of food. So if you know that, you will know how to eat in order to keep your compassion alive.

If we know how to produce our food in such a way that we can reduce violence and destruction, and decrease the suffering of living beings, we are keeping alive the compassion inside. The one who grows food, and the one who eats the food, both can help to maintain the compassion within our hearts. We know very well that without that element of compassion within us, we cannot be happy persons. Without compassion we cannot relate to any living beings, including humans. Eating, walking, doing your daily activities—we should learn how to do these things mindfully, in a way that can help compassion to stay alive in us. This is very important, that is our practice, for eating is also to preserve our compassion, because you don't want to eat the flesh of your own son.

Yesterday Sister Annabel gave a wonderful talk on the Four Nutriments, in English, and those of you in the Lower Hamlet may like to listen to it. Sister Chan Duc elaborated the teaching I had offered the day before on the Four Nutriments. I only spoke about the first two nutriments, and she continued with the third and the fourth. I was talking one day about the therapist as someone who can cook for us, offering us the kind of food that can keep our bodies and our souls sane and healthy. The therapist should also be an architect, in order to create an environment where we feel safe, where we can live our lives with freedom, with stability, where we can be protected, where we will not be destroyed by sickness, depression, and so on. A therapist should practice like an architect, like a cook, like a teacher, like a monk, like a Buddha, creating space where you feel safe, where you get only the sane kind of food, that won't destroy your body or your consciousness. In our daily lives we consume so many toxins and poisons, we consume a lot of violence and craving and suspicion and despair, and destroy ourselves. So the therapist, like a Buddha, should be able to create a Pure Land, so that people can come and be protected and be healed, be transformed. The therapist should be at the same time a Sangha builder, a Sangha convener, a summoner of practitioners, so that among us there are those who have a solid and joyful practice to support us, to remind us, and to teach us how to live deeply every moment of our daily lives, to breathe, to walk, to listen to the bell, to enjoy our lunch together. Therefore the therapists, like the physicians, have to come together to operate as a Sangha, because alone they cannot fulfill their task of being an architect, a cook, a Sangha builders, of being a Pure Land. Therefore, all of us have to follow the same principle of creating the Pure Land and building a Sangha.

Eating in the ultimate dimension, I chew as I breathe, with rhythm. You might use this gatha, this poem, in order to chew your food, and keep your awareness alive, and touch the ultimate dimension while eating your lunch

Aware of the suffering, we nourish each other. The main thing is to maintain compassion alive, and to help beings going to the other shore.

When we eat, we have to be aware of the suffering also. That does not mean that we have to suffer, because eating can be very joyful, but the background should be always there. To have an opportunity to sit down quietly like that, to have enough time to spend with the Sangha, and to eat this amount of food together in an atmosphere of safety, of friendship and of awareness, is something not many people can afford. That can give rise to a lot of happiness, but you know that happiness is always seen against the background of suffering, in order for happiness to continue. The moment when you exile suffering, happiness will no longer be happiness. It's as with black and white: white will

meal in mindfulness, the joy of being with the Sangha, the joy of feeling protected and supported by the collective energy of the Sangha; and yet we know that suffering is there in life, in every grain of rice, in every piece of tofu, in every spoonful of milk. That is why we take the vow that, although we have to suffer when we feed each other, we accept that in order for a chance for every living being to go to the other shore, the shore of enlightenment, the shore of safety.

Living beings eat each other, that is a fact. Tigers eat the deer, big fish eat the small fish, and we also consume other living beings. Even if we are vegetarians we can only reduce the eating of living beings to some degree. That is why there is the words 'Aware of the suffering' inside, because there is a little bit of suffering in that taste of happiness, enough to keep our awareness alive. Even if I have to become your food, I will practice in order not to let hatred become my nature. I offer myself to you so that you can survive. That is the reality of the world: living beings are eating each other. As practitioners, we cannot entirely escape that situation, but our practice is to keep compassion alive, and to relieve as much suffering as we can through our way of daily living

Aware of the suffering we try to feed each other, even with ourselves. The main thing is to keep compassion alive, and to help beings to the other shore, the shore of safety, stability and freedom.

I think human beings can be described as having a safer life than other living beings. Although we have no right to hunt each other or kill each other--the law forbids it--if we continue to create war, to exploit each other, to make use of others to get rich, to consume more, and we continue to do these things at the expense of other living beings, it is as though we are eating the flesh of our father or mother, our brothers. We are actually one with all of these beings, whether they live in an over-developed country or an under-developed country. We know that if we learn how to refrain from making war, from creating more social injustice and repression, we can bring much more safety to human beings, and at the same time we can better protect the lives of other living beings. Now, war and alcohol and drugs and consumption and violence are making us much less safe in our lives as human beings. In fact, human beings can put themselves in a much safer situation than other living beings, but because of our cravings and discrimination, we have made our situation much less safe than it could be. That is why our practice is to be aware, to be mindful, to live each moment of our lives deeply, so that we can keep compassion alive in our hearts, so that our lives and the lives of those around us become safer. When we enjoy more safety, we will be able to provide more safety to other living beings. We can protect the environment; protect the ecosystem, so that other living beings can also enjoy safety.

*With the awareness of suffering in my heart, we nourish each other. We know that the main thing is to keep compassion alive and to help living beings cross to the other shore, the shore of greater safety, the shore of more freedom."* It is so easy to practice in Vietnamese, because it is the kind of poem that has only five words in each line.

I use the poem in order to maintain my mindfulness of life. You might like to use that poem in English, or German. You might rewrite it so that it will fit the rhythm of your practice.

*I am blooming as a flower, I am fresh as the dew.* I chew according to this gatha also. I also use the gatha: *This is the Pure Land, the Pure Land is here.* This also is a song that is available in Vietnamese, but our friends who do not speak Vietnamese have not had a chance to learn and to practice it. Thay Doji has tried to translate it into French; but because he used the Vietnamese music, it does not sound very natural to the French ear, so I hope that someone will help with new music. Each line has only four words:

Day la tinh do

Tinh do la day

Mim cuoi chanh niem

An tru hom nay.

But la la chin

Phap la may bay

Tang than khap chon

Que huong noi nay.

Tho vao hoa no

Tho ra truc lay

Tam khong rang buoc

Tieu dao thang ngay.

I chew my food with this poem. And the meaning is this:

This is the pure land;

The pure land is right here.

This mindful smile helps me

To establish myself in the present moment.

Look, I see the Buddha as a red leaf,

And the dharma as a cloud.

My Sangha is everywhere,

And my true homeland is just right here.

Breathing in, I see the chrysanthemum blooming;

Breathing out, I see the bamboo bending.

My mind is totally free,

And I enjoy it day after day.

During that time of breathing, you keep the Pure Land alive, in the here and the now. Yesterday I said that it's up to you to choose either hell or the Pure Land, because both hell and the Pure Land are there in every cell of your body. If you allow hell to manifest, it will manifest. All of us have experienced how hot hell is, but if you want to choose the Pure Land, you can do that. Just make use of your breathing, your walking, in order to make the Pure Land manifest. With these methods of walking, of breathing, of eating, you keep the Pure Land alive. You don't have to die in order to enter the Kingdom of God; in fact, you have to be very alive to do so. With full awareness, when you become fully alive, you only need to make one step, and there you are—in the Kingdom of God.

So I repeat this gatha:

This is the Pure Land

The Pure Land is here.

This mindful smile helps me

To establish myself in the present moment.

Look! I see the Buddha as a red leaf;

My Sangha is everywhere...

Everything I see, I identify as elements of my Sangha--the blue sky, the clouds, the leaves, the trees, the birds, the pebbles, the path where I practice walking meditation-- everything belongs to my Sangha. I don't have to go back to my hometown in order to find my Sangha. My Sangha is everywhere. Everything around me supports my being awake. Every sound, every sight supports and maintains me in the Pure Land. My lack of mindfulness alone can bring me out of the Pure Land, but everything else around me is supporting me in order to nourish me in the Pure Land.

My Sangha is everywhere,

And my true home is right here in the here and the now.

Breathing in, I see the chrysanthemum blooming,

Breathing out I see the bamboo bending

My mind is fully free,

And I enjoy it day after day, month after month.

Please make use of that gatha, rewrite it in German, in Italian, in English, in French. We offer it to our friends as a gatha of practice for our walking meditation, our sitting meditation, and our mindful lunch.

There was a nuclear scientist who lived in England, named David Bohm. He used the terms "the explicate order" and "the implicate order." His insight is similar to the insight of the historical dimension and the ultimate dimension. He said that in the explicate order, you see things outside of each other. A table is outside of a flower, and you are outside of me. But the other dimension of reality can be called implicate order, that is, if you look deeply, you see that the flower is in the table and that the table is in the flower. One electron can be everywhere at the same time, and one electron is made of every electron, and so on. It is very much the insight of inter-being, and in the implicate order, everything contains everything else. Just as I said yesterday, looking deeply into a flower you can see a cloud, you can see the sunshine, you can see the earth, you can see the compost, you can see everything in the cosmos within it. So, we know that looking deeply helps us to see the ultimate dimension, the implicate order, and we get rid of notions like inside and outside, this or that; we get rid of pairs of opposites.

In Buddhist language, we have the term *nirvana*. It is another term to describe the ultimate dimension of reality. Nirvana means first of all extinction. You may ask, extinction of what? It is first of all the extinction of ideas, such as birth and death, inside and outside, being and non-being. These ideas are responsible for our fear, our illusion, our suffering, our discrimination. Inside my right hand there is the wisdom of nondiscrimination. My right hand never discriminates against my left hand. The insight of inter-being is there in my right hand, in both hands. That is why they can be together all the time, they can be in harmony with each other all the time. Nirvana is first of all the extinction of ideas, of pairs of opposites. It also means the extinction of the kind of suffering that can be created by these ideas. Because of these ideas, we have created a lot of fear and suffering, so when we are able to remove the ideas, then we can remove the suffering caused by these ideas. Death for instance--death is an idea. And birth is also an idea.

When you look deeply into a sheet of paper, and also into yourself, you will be able to touch your nature of no-birth and no-death. To be born, according to our idea, is to become something from nothing. From no one, you suddenly become someone. That is our idea of birth. But if we practice looking deeply, we see that that is a wrong idea, because nothing can become something from nothing. A sheet of paper, before it came into existence, had been something else. You can see a sheet of paper in a tree, you can see a sheet of paper in a cloud, because touching this sheet of paper with your mindfulness, you can see a cloud inside. You don't have to be a poet in order to see that: you know that if there were no cloud there would no rain, and no tree could grow. If the tree could not grow, you could not have the sheet of paper, because this sheet of paper is made from a kind of paste made of trees. So it is sure that the cloud is in the sheet of paper, and if you try to remove the cloud, the sheet of paper will collapse. There would be no paper at all if there were no cloud. That is inter-being—the cloud is inside the paper.



cloud, and from the sunshine, because the sunshine also helped the tree to grow. It was born from the logger, who cut down the tree, and it was also born from many other elements. So, before the sheet of paper was born, it had already been something. The day of its birth is only a day of continuation. You can see the previous lives of the sheet of paper. That is why it is better to celebrate our birthdays by singing "Happy Continuation Day." Really the moment of your birth is only a moment of continuation. Before you were born of your mother, you had been there in her for many months. That was not exactly the day of your birth. You may be tempted to think that the real day of your birth was the day of your conception, but if you ask the same questions, you will find out that even before that day you had already been there somewhere. Maybe half in your father, or before your father was born, you had been there in your grandfather, in your grandmother. It is a very interesting trip to go and search for your identity, your origin. In the Zen circles, they sometimes give as a subject of meditation a question such as, "Tell me what your face looked like before your grandmother was born?" That is an invitation for you to go and find out your true nature. If you do well, you will touch the nature of no-birth and no-death. You will know that you have never been born. You have gone through a series of transformations, of renewals, but the idea of being born is just an idea. If you have never been born, how can you die? The idea of dying is that from something you suddenly become nothing, from someone, you suddenly become no one.

When we burn this sheet of paper, you may think that it will die and become nothing, but that is not true. After it is burned, the sheet of paper becomes clouds again, becomes smoke, becomes ash, and becomes the heat that penetrates your body and the cosmos. It would be very interesting if you could follow the journey of the sheet of paper. You could go to the cloud and observe what the cloud is doing, and what the sheet of paper is doing. You could go after the heat produced by the burning of the sheet of paper, and see how far it can go, and what it will produce in the future. You could follow the amount of ash, to see what kind of flower it will become in a few months. It would be a very interesting discovery. The true nature of the sheet of paper is no-birth and no-death, and you also share the same kind of nature. Your true nature is no-birth and no-death, and that nature we call nirvana. The Buddha said that you can touch nirvana, even with your body. You can touch your true nature of no-birth and no-death, even with your body. It is like the wave—the wave can touch her nature, namely water, but she is water. What is the subject of touching and what is the object of touching, when the wave touches water? She is already water, why does she have to touch it? Nirvana is our true nature, Peter is our true nature, and we don't have to look for him or for her. Our true nature is no-birth and no-death. With the practice of deep listening, of deep touching, of deep looking, we will be able to touch our true nature, and we will be able to free ourselves from notions, from ideas, from fear, from discrimination, and that is the way we can get the greatest relief with the practice.

Yesterday there was a question on life and death: from where have we come, and after dying, what are we going to be? The most important topic of meditation is life and death. They always say so; the matter of life and death is the greatest subject of meditation. The business of life and death is a big business, which means it is the object of your meditation. When meditating on the object of life and death, you will be able to touch the ultimate dimension, the nature of no-life and no-death, and you will touch nirvana, even with your body.

So there is a continuation. You might come to a practice center to learn the practice in order to get some relief, to undergo some transformation and healing. You might suffer less because of the practice of sitting and walking and breathing, total relaxation, touching the earth...yes! But the greatest relief can only be obtained if you are able to touch nirvana, to touch the ultimate dimension, and that is not something outside of our capacity. When we look at the wave, we know that the wave can lead her life as a wave, but if she knows how to live her life as water, the quality of her life will be much greater. She will not suffer a lot, like the other waves who don't know that they are, at the same time, water.

(Three Bells—end of Dharma Talk)

**Dear Friends,**

**These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.**

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# The Need To Love

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Today is the New Year Day of 1998 and we are in the New Hamlet in our Winter Retreat. Today's Dharma talk is about love, the necessity to love, and the need to love.

One day the Buddha was visited by, I think, 16 people, 16 young people. They were about 30 years old. They were very bright people and they had practiced with other teachers. They had even taught the practice to many young students. They had heard of the Buddha and came as a group in order to talk to the Buddha. Each of them took turns to ask the Buddha questions about the practice. The second person who came forward and asked the Buddha questions, his name was Maitreya – it means love. The Buddha said that this young man, Maitreya, would be the next Buddha on this earth. In Asian countries on New Year Day we celebrate the coming of the Buddha Maitreya, the Buddha of love. I think it must be true that the future Buddha is somewhere, very ready to manifest to us. We have to prepare the ground for his or her appearance. I have the impression that maybe this time the Buddha will appear not as a person but as Sangha, as community. We have to be very open in order to be able to recognize the new Buddha and, whose name is love.

The first question that Maitreya asked Shakyamuni Buddha was this: Lord Buddha, is there anyone happy on earth? Who is the happy person on earth?" And then he continued, "Is there anyone who is not full of agitation in his/her mind? Is there anyone who can understand pairs of opposites without getting caught in his thinking between them? Who would you say deserves the title of 'great human being'? Who is that person who is not caught up in greed and craving?" These were the questions asked by Maitreya to the Buddha. One of the interesting questions he asked is: "Is there anyone who can understand pairs of opposites without getting caught in his thinking between them?" Pairs of opposites like birth and death; above and below, self and non-self, being and non-being... these are pairs of opposites. Not only philosophers get stuck in them, but also many of us get stuck in these pairs of opposites. Japan is a Buddhist country that used to present the future Buddha as a young person. On Christmas Sister Gina gave me a present of a very beautiful statue of Maitreya as a young person...which is very famous in Japan. I like to describe Maitreya as a young person also, surrounded by a lot of children of all kinds of colors.

We are setting up a monastery in the state of Vermont in North America. We are going to build a small Buddha Hall. In that Buddha Hall there will be a young Buddha, surrounded by children of all kinds of colors, like white, red, and so on. I think the children can help us with ideas as how to build that little Buddha Hall. We don't want to build a big Buddha Hall. We want to build a Dharma Hall, so that many people can come and listen to the Dharma talks and practice sitting meditation and Dharma discussion. But we don't want to build a very big Buddha Hall. We want to build a big Buddha Hall on the top of the hill where there are a lot of maple trees. Every time we finish a Dharma talk we will practice walking meditation uphill in order to visit the Buddha and to sit with the Buddha for about 20 minutes before we go down. I would like for people, after they have visited the Buddha, will meet the children sitting around the Buddha also. If among you there are talented sculptors, please think about the Buddha surrounded by children.

The French writer Antoine de St. Exupéry said something like this: "To love each other is not just to sit there looking at each other but to look together in the same direction." I don't know if that statement impresses you, but when I heard it, I reflected a lot on it. One day I was laughing alone, because I visualized a couple who looked together in the same direction. And that direction was the direction of the television because it's no longer a pleasure to look at each other. In order to suffer less both of them try to look in the direction of the television set in order to forget some of their suffering. When they first got married to each other they were very excited and they spent a lot

of time sitting and looking at each other. But since they don't know how to practice, how to keep their love alive, how to deepen their understanding and their compassion they continue to cause a lot of damage and a lot of distress in their relationship. One day it happened that they realized that it was no longer pleasant to look at the other person. When you look at the other person, the suffering in you is watered. Therefore, instead of looking at each other, we silently agree that it is much better that both of us look at the television. That is a real tragedy.

When we love someone, we want to believe that the person we love embodies something... something beautiful and something true. We must find in him or her something that is good, beautiful and true. Otherwise, why should we love him or why should we love her? Because we are hungry. We are hungry for something good. We are hungry for something beautiful. We are hungry for something true. (That is why we try to get some... we try to contemplate some.) And the person we love can embody these three values, the Beautiful, the Good and the True. We feel that we don't have these things. That is why when we think there is someone who has some of these things, we feel that we need him or we need her very much. In that kind of love, in that kind of need, in that kind of belief there is something serving as the base. That is the feeling of emptiness, the feeling that we lack something basic in us. We feel we don't have the basic goodness, we don't have the basic beauty, and we don't have the basic truth in us. And we wander around like this, looking for something beautiful, something good, and something true. When you have found a person whom, you think, possesses some of these things you call Good, True and Beautiful, you are so happy. But beneath that kind of happiness there is still some fear. What if this is not true beauty? What if this is not true goodness? You are afraid that what you are contemplating is fake! You are afraid that some day you will discover that the object of your love is just the object of your imagination. While loving, you imagine a lot. You create an image in your head. You are afraid that the reality does not coincide with the beautiful image you have created. That is why there is always something fearful in you. First of all, there is a feeling of lacking something in you, of emptiness. Secondly the feeling of fear. Even if you have found something, you are afraid that that something is not really what you believe... it may not be true. Even if you believe that it is true, you are still afraid because you know that things are impermanent. You think what if in three years or in five years that person does not love me anymore. That is why you urge the other person to repeat again and again the statement "I love you, darling. I love you." Because we have a feeling of insecurity and we are afraid.

In that kind of relationship you have to comfort the other person and you have to pacify him or her. You have to assure him or her that your love will be long lasting. But deep within yourself you know that things are impermanent. You have observed and you have seen that people have changed. Love in the beginning may turn out to be something very sour after two or three years. You have seen so many things like that and you don't really believe that the other person is going to love you for all his or her life. So fear is something existing in your relationship, along with emptiness and uncertainty... and fear. When we contemplate the other person, it means that we do not believe that we have in us the qualities we value in him or her. There is a need to contemplate in order to admire, because you get a feeling of happiness, a feeling of comfort when you admire the Beauty, the Goodness, and the Truth embodied by the other person. At the same time you know that the other person has an image of you in his/her head. And you are also afraid that one day he will discover that the image he has of you is not really what you are. You try to pretend and you try to play the role. You try to live up to the image that the other person has of you in his/her head. You do that with all your heart but still fear remains in you. The fear that one day he/she will discover that I am not what I pretend to be. Like someone who goes to a cosmetic shop in order to buy this and that. We want to wear this kind of things in order to appear better than what we really are.

In the spiritual and moral aspects we do the same. We use other kinds of cosmetics in order to make ourselves look better in the eyes of the person who loves us. The fact that we are using cosmetics for our body, our consciousness and for our spirit is in itself a tragedy. A tragedy, because we don't believe that we are really beautiful. So we have to try to make ourselves beautiful. We don't really believe that we are good, but we try to behave, to do things that make us look like good. We don't believe that we are true. Deep in us, there may be a feeling that we are betraying the person we love and we are betraying ourselves. And there is the feeling that you are not worth the love of the other person. We have a complex of not being worthy of him or her, who loves us. We can touch these things deeply within ourselves. These things constitute elements of our daily unhappiness for we have not tried to touch ourselves deeply. We only have a vague feeling of what we truly are. We feel that we are empty. We are not worthy. And we are going to look for something to help us fill that kind of vacuum within us. Love may mean going to look for something so that you can fill up yourself. Something that you really need, the True, the Good and the Beautiful. And when you have found something true, good and beautiful, you are still afraid. Because you don't know whether he or she is really true, good or beautiful or if he or she is just trying to fool you. Because that someone may be

any other person. A teacher may not have true beauty, true goodness, or the truth within himself/herself. He may be using "cosmetics" in order to look like a good teacher. Very often we discover that our teacher is not what we have believed him or her to be. We get angry with him/her. We get deeply disappointed and we go and look for another teacher. That is also the process of love, seeking for something we believe we really don't have in ourselves, and that we really need.

Very often we feel like we are a pot without a cover. We believe that the cover is somewhere else in the world and if we look very hard, we'll find the right cover to cover our pot. The feeling of vacuum, of emptiness is always there. We may call it the need to love, the need to be loved and the need to fill the vacuum in us with something that makes our life meaningful. So when we contemplate the other person, we have the opportunity to see what we really lack. We have the opportunity to contemplate what we think we do not have within ourselves in order to have the feeling that we have something to lean on, to take refuge in and that diminishes some of our suffering. In the meantime we also want to be contemplated. We want to be the object of attention, the object of another person's contemplation. Because the feeling of emptiness, the feeling of being a vacuum is in us, and we don't know how to embrace our own suffering. That is why we need some energy of attention from the other person. We need someone who will look at us all the time and who can embrace our emptiness, our vacuum and our suffering with his or her energy of mindfulness. And soon we become addicted to that kind of energy. Without that attention we can not live. Love, here, is the need for attention, the energy of attention from the other person helps us to feel less empty. The energy that helps to embrace the block of suffering in us. We ourselves cannot generate that energy in order to take care of ourselves. We need the energy of someone else. And when that person suffers so much, he/she does not have enough energy to embrace you, to make you suffer less... and you become disappointed. You think that the presence of that person is no longer helpful to you and your love vanishes.

(Bell)

If you are lucky, you have a chance to discover that in the person you love the element of goodness is something real. The element of beauty is something real. Since you have had the opportunity to spend a lot of time with him/her, you have had a chance to verify and to make sure that the element of Beauty, the element of Goodness is really there in the person you love. The Buddha defined Maitri, loving kindness, as beauty. If you practice loving kindness, what you experience is the Beautiful. I was very impressed when I came across that sentence. Someone who has a good heart, who is always willing to do something in order to bring relief, to bring joy, to bring the feeling of well-being to other people, if you happen to love someone like that, to know someone like that, you are very fortunate. That person is motivated by an energy to offer well being and to offer joy to other people, to animals, to vegetables. And since you have lived with him/her for some time, you have arrived at the conclusion, that this quality is real in him/her. You see it as something very beautiful. It is that energy which makes that person beautiful. When you are able to touch that energy of beauty within him/her, then you also have the opportunity to touch that very energy within yourself. You do not believe that you have it, you don't believe that you are capable of loving, of being loving, and being compassionate. You have the complex that love is not in you; you are not capable of loving. And you have suffered from that kind of feeling, and that kind of conviction. You despise yourself. You underestimate yourself. You think that you are worthless. But since you have the good fortune of loving someone who has the energy of Maitri, of loving kindness, you have a chance. Because touching that energy of love in him/her you have a chance to touch the energy of love and compassion in yourself. That is why your mindfulness is so important. Mindfulness alone helps you to recognize what is beautiful, what is good, what is real and what is true around yourself and within yourself.

The morning of Buddha's enlightenment at the foot of the bodhi tree, he was so surprised. He had been meditating for the whole night. In the early morning, at the moment when he saw the morning star, he declared, "How strange! Everyone has it! Everyone has it within himself/herself... that capacity for understanding, that capacity for awakening, and the capacity for loving. And yet, they have let themselves sink in the ocean of suffering, life after life." Enlightenment came to the Buddha as a surprise. He discovered that the capacities to love and to understand are in every one of us. But so many of us don't believe it, don't believe that we are capable of awakening that we are capable of loving, or of understanding. That is why we have a complex of not being worthy of the person we love, of not being worthy of our ancestors, of not being worthy of our teacher... and so on. That inferiority complex, of unworthiness should be transformed. The way to transform it, is to recognize the worthiness in another person, maybe the person you love. To recognize love and compassion as a real source of energy in that person is a very important thing. Because when you touch it, you have the opportunity to go back to yourself and to touch it within

yourself also. Contemplating what is in front of you turns out to be contemplating yourself. It is like when we bow to a Buddha statue on the altar, we have a chance to touch the Buddha within ourselves. There are people who have had a chance to allow the energy of understanding, of compassion, and of love in them to manifest. When these energies are manifested in themselves, they become happy people. The person who has the energy of love, of compassion, of joy, of freedom is always a happy person. If we have a chance to touch such a person, to love such a person, then we also have the chance to go back to our self and touch these beautiful things that lie deep in each one of us. Maybe there is a lot of suffering in us, a lot of doubt, a lot of despair, or a lot of jealousy in us. These layers of suffering cannot destroy the basic goodness in us, the basic love in us.

The Buddha said, "The mind is always shining like a mirror." The mind or the nature of the mind is shining. Imagine a mirror that is kept for many, many years in the mud. Now we unearth the mirror and we use water and we use a piece of cloth in order to wipe off the dust and the mud away. When the mud and the dust have been removed, the mirror is able to shine again. Our mind is the Buddha mind. Our mind has basic enlightenment, the basic capacity to reflect things as they are. Because of suffering and wrong perceptions, which are the mud and the dust in us, we have been distorting things. We have been distorting ourselves. We have been distorting the people around us. We have a lot of wrong perceptions about what is inside of us and around us, because our mirror is not able to shine, as it should. Our practice is to remove the layers of suffering and wrong perceptions, in order to allow the mirror of the mind to shine again. The belief that you have within yourself basic Understanding, basic Goodness, basic Beauty is so essential to the practice of Buddhist meditation. Usually we believe that we are not worth much. That is why we seek in another person what we think we lack. A teacher can give you some of the things you don't have, but a good teacher is one who can help you to discover the teacher within. He/she will tell you that you have to go back to your own teacher. Because within yourself is basic goodness, basic enlightenment, basic compassion, basic joy and happiness. If you go back to yourself and touch yourself deeply, you will discover that teacher within. A good teacher is the one that does not want to make you dependent on him/her. A good teacher is someone who is capable of telling you to go back to yourself and to discover the teacher within. You don't need to beg for anything. You don't need to beg for beauty. You don't need to beg for goodness. You don't need to beg for truth. You have everything within yourself. The statement that the Buddha made at the time of his enlightenment is about that: "It's so strange. Everyone has it and yet they have let themselves be carried away, sink, life after life, in the ocean of suffering."

So what does it mean to love? To love is to look at each other and to look together in the same direction. If we know how to look, then looking at each other is also wonderful. Because if you know how to look at each other and discover the basic goodness and the basic beauty within the other person and you have a chance to discover the same thing within yourself. Looking at the other person is also to look at yourself. You have a chance to discover that love is something real and existing.

Opportunities have been given to you, to each of us, to experience this. Love is something that really exists. Love is the energy helping us to be strong, to be loving and to be caring. We care for the well-being of other people and other living beings. We care about the relief of other people's suffering. We care about how to help people suffer less and become capable of happiness. When we touch someone who can embody that energy of love, we touch at the same time what we call the Beautiful. Because love is beauty. If by our own experience we know that love and beauty exist and can be generated in our daily life, our life begins to have meaning. We will suffer less, much less, right away. When we have learned how to be with people who can embody love and beauty we can learn to generate that energy of love and beauty in ourselves.

The Buddha said, the practice of Maitri, or loving-kindness brings us beauty, beauty that makes life meaningful. He also said that if you practice Karuna or compassion, what you feel is infinite space. Karuna is the kind of energy that helps you to suffer less that helps people around you to suffer less. Karuna is the kind of energy that helps to transform the suffering in us. Suffering is like the compost, the garbage. And love is like the flower. While the compost or the garbage, is not beautiful, love and the flower are beautiful. The role of suffering and the role of compost are clear. If we know how to make use of suffering, if we know how to make use of the compost, we can bring about the flower and beauty. Understanding the suffering of other people around us and understanding our own suffering is very crucial. Because only by understanding suffering can we know how to transform the suffering into love. When beauty is there, when love is there, when compassion is there, you begin to feel a lot of space inside and around you. When we speak of love, compassion, we tend to believe that the person, who profits from that love, and from that compassion, is another person. We tend to forget that right in the moment when love is born in our

compassion, when they are born immediately they bring beauty and happiness right away to us.

When you are determined to reconcile with a person you have been angry with, although that person is not there with you, although that person does not know that you are ready to reconcile, to forgive and to let go of everything, that willingness, that capacity to reconcile within yourself can make you feel much better right away. That is why we have to remember that the moment when the source of love and compassion begins to spring up in us, beauty is offered to us and happiness is offered to us. And together with that beauty and with that happiness there is a lot of space. That is why the Buddha said that when you practice loving kindness, you experience a lot of space. That space is the environment in which joy can be born in you. True happiness and true joy will not be possible if there is not enough space within your heart. We have space for everyone and we have space for everything. Our mind has become unlimited. Maitri is translated as loving kindness, the first element of true love. Karuna is translated as compassion, the capacity to relieve the suffering and to transform suffering. That is the second element of true love. Mudita, joy, is the third element of true love, as taught by the Buddha. The fourth element of true love is Upeksa, which means equanimity or non-discrimination. It can be translated as freedom. You love not because that person belongs to your family. You love not because he is of the same religious belief as you. You love not because he is your son, she is your daughter or your wife. You love because that person needs to be loved. That's all. You love without conditions whatsoever. It means unconditional love. You love in order to bring relief to that person, to transform the suffering in that person, to offer joy to him, to offer happiness to him because he needs that. You don't ask for anything in return. You love him because he needs your love. You love her because she needs your love. That's all. The Buddha said that when you practice equanimity, what you get is nothing at all. Nothing at all is something wonderful. Nothing at all, that means that you don't need anything. You already have everything.

When you practice Buddhist meditation, you have to learn to look at things in a very different way. When you look at your body, you may say this: "This body is not me." There is a general belief that, "I am this body. This body is mine." When we first hear the Buddha telling us that we are not this body. We don't believe it right away. The Buddha is a very respectable person; there must be something true in his statement. So I accept this statement, but I have not seen that this body is not me. Maybe after ten or twenty years of practicing Buddhist meditation, I will be able to understand something about it. But now it's very difficult for me to believe that this body is not me. This body... not only is it not me, but it is also not mine, it is not my possession. With your practice of deep looking, one day you will discover that this body is not really you. You may say that house is not me, I have bought that house. That house belongs to me. Some day, I might buy another house and I will leave the first house. That house is not me. But this body... how could it be the same? But if we practice looking deeply, we see that our body is a kind of house. And some day the house will be destroyed. We have to look in such a way that we can go beyond the body to see the truth. This body is not me.

Many of you have been here during the Summer Retreat and you have seen the lotus pond with so many beautiful flowers and many beautiful lotus leaves. Hundreds of lotus flowers bloom during the summer opening with many beautiful green lotus leaves. In winter, if you go there, to the lotus pond, you won't see any lotus flowers or any lotus leaves. In winter, you see that the leaves are decaying, rotten and just about to become mud. When you look deeply into a lotus flower, when you look deeply into a lotus leaf, you have a chance to see beyond the lotus flower and the lotus leaf. Now, in winter, deep in the mud, there are robust, big lotus roots. Let us visualize a lotus leaf, born in the month of April and living through May, June, July, August and September. If you contemplate the lotus leaf and all its beauty and if you know what is happening to the lotus root during these months... not only it displays its beauty, not only it produces other lotus leaves in the distance...if you are a senior lotus leaf, you have the duty to produce a younger lotus leaf a little bit further on. While you enjoy the sunshine, while you enjoy the water and the minerals, you are making your roots within the mud grow bigger and bigger all the time. You make other flowers and leaves arise. And they continue like you, they will continue the work of nourishing the lotus roots and producing other leaves and other lotuses. You sit by the pond and you just look. You discover what is really the life of a lotus leaf. In winter you can recognize a leaf that is decaying, ready to become part of the mud, in order to nourish the lotus roots that are still alive deep in the mud. Suppose you come to a young lotus leaf, very green, very beautiful and you tell her, "You are not this green lotus leaf, it's not you." She may be shocked by what you say. The lotus leaf also has the capacity of experiencing the truth. She knows that she has her base deep in the mud. Each minute of her existence continues the life of the lotus. If you sit by the lotus pond at this time of the year, looking at a decaying lotus leaf, you see that the lotus leaf is still there and alive. You are no longer caught in a perception, in the object of your perception anymore. Suddenly your feeling of fear and your feeling of sorrow vanish, because

you can see beyond the lotus leaf.

In wintertime, when I practice walking meditation in Upper Hamlet, I always practice awareness of the oak leaves I step on. Every time I make a step, I am able to see the oak leaf not as what I am stepping on, but I can see it much deeper. I can see it in the oak tree. I can see it a little bit everywhere and I know that this dead oak leaf is going back to the soil, to continue to nourish the soil and the roots of the oak tree. When a person dies, suddenly you feel that he or she is no longer there. There is only the dead body and you are caught by the idea of non-being. He was there, but now he is no longer there. She was there, but now she is no longer there. You get caught in a pair of opposites: life and death...to be alive - to be dead. But if you are able to look deeply into the nature of life and death, you are no longer caught in these ideas, in these concepts or perceptions.

I told my students that one day they would see me in the form of a dead leaf. And they should know how to look deeply, how to look for me beyond that dead leaf. I have lived deeply every moment of my life and I have been continued in so many ways. With the practice of looking deeply they can recognize my presence a little bit everywhere, including within themselves. So there is no reason why, when you look at the dead body of some person, you have to be caught in sorrow or you have to be caught in the idea that this person is now dead. When you go to the lotus pond and when you look deeply into a dead lotus leaf, look so deeply that you can see the lotus leaf not in the lotus leaf. You'll be able to get the kind of insight that can help you to transcend the fear of non-being. If you are able to transcend the fear of non-being, you are already able to transcend the fear of being, because non-being is just the other side of being. Being and non-being are just one pair of opposites.

The question asked by Maitreya is: "Is there anyone in the world who is not caught in pairs of opposites so that he can become utterly free?" The Buddha said, "Yes." When you become a man or a woman of nothing, you are utterly free and no fear can abide in you anymore. That is why to become a man or a woman of nothing, is to become entirely free. This body is not me. If you can go beyond the statement, if you can look deeply into your body and see that you are not this body, then you have become a person of nothing. Nothing can be a source of sorrow, nothing can be a source of anger for you anymore, because you have practiced equanimity, you have practiced Upeksa and you have become a man, a woman of nothing, namely a man or a woman of everything. I repeat what the Buddha said: When you practice Maitri you get the Beautiful. When you practice Karuna you get limitless space. When you practice Mudita, joy, you get limitless consciousness. Not only your mind is consciousness, not only your mind is perceiving, thinking, but also the thinking or consciousness is there in a cloud. Thinking is also there in the blue sky. The thinking is there in the flower. Everything is a manifestation of consciousness, and limitless consciousness is what you get when you practice Mudita. When you practice Upeksa, freedom, you become a man or a woman of nothing. You are not attached and you are not bound. You are not limited by anything including your body and including your consciousness. Because consciousness is still conditioned by many elements, exactly like your body. The disintegration of your body and the disintegration of your consciousness will not be able to affect you anymore.

I would like to go back to the questions asked by Maitreya, the future Buddha. Who in the world is a happy person? We can say a happy person is there, when he is a man of nothing, and when she is a woman of nothing; not being caught in anything, and not identifying anything as himself or herself. This is a very deep practice. Even your own body, one day your body will be disintegrating like the lotus flower and that does not mean that you are disintegrating. You have to go beyond your body. You have to go beyond your consciousness. Is there anyone in the world who is not full of agitation? Agitation is what we have in our head. We are agitated by many things. Anything can make us agitated because we get caught in what we are, in what we think we are and in what we think we are not. So it is better to practice, so that we can become a man or a woman of nothing, and not caught in anything. Is there anyone who can understand pairs of opposites so that he will not get stuck in his thinking about them? Are you that person who is free from notions like being and non-being, birth and death, I and not-I? Who is there who is not caught up in the world of craving? A man of nothing, a woman of nothing, a person who is not caught by anything as self or non-self is a free person. And this is the answer given by the Buddha. It is the person whose actions are pure and good. That person does not have the thirst of craving. That person never loses mindfulness. That person has become extinguished, calm. Extinguished here means the fire of craving, the fire of anger, the fire of ignorance is no longer consuming that person. That is the person who understands pairs of opposites without being stuck in the thinking about them. This person I would call a Great Being, a being who is free from the world of craving. This is the answer offered by the Buddha to the future Buddha, Maitreya. Today in Buddhist countries, on the first day of the year, we have the tradition of honoring the future Buddha. That is why I have brought the questions of Maitreya



one day: "I want to transmit the lamp of the Dharma to one of you who will offer the best insight gatha." The Fifth Patriarch had many, many disciples, including many learned monks and nuns. One of his senior disciples, Thanh Tu, already a Dharma teacher, gave teachings to other monks and nuns in the community. He offered this gatha:

"The body is like a bodhi tree. The mind is like a mirror stand.

Again and again you have to use a duster to clean it. Do not let the dust of the world cover it."

That is why every day you have to remove, to take care of the mirror, so that the dust of the world will not be able to cover the light, the shining power of the mirror. To me this gatha is very beautiful and very practical.

In the Platform Sutra it is said that after the senior disciple Thanh Tu had presented this gatha, no one in the Sangha dared to present another insight gatha. They said that Thanh Tu is the best. "If he has presented a gatha like that, no one among us can compete with him. So let's leave it like that. He is going to receive the transmission." I like the gatha too, but I have a question. In the first sentence he says that the body is like a bodhi tree and in the second sentence he says that the mind is like a bright mirror. In the last sentence he only talks about the mind and he leaves the body alone. There is no balance within the poem. That is my feeling. If I am to criticize that gatha poem... it is that he doesn't pay enough attention to the body. He said that the body is important. But he said nothing about taking care of the body. So there is an unbalance. According to the story of the Platform Sutra there was another disciple who does not know how to read or write. Since joining the Sangha, he stayed in the kitchen and did very hard work, like pounding the rice, carrying water and chopping wood. He never had a chance to meet the Fifth Patriarch. One day he saw many people bringing incense to the wall where the gatha was written. And he said, "What are you doing, my brothers?" They said, "We are burning incense to honor this new insight gatha." He said, "Would you like to read it to me? Because I don't know how to read." Then another novice read it to him. After having heard it, he kept silent and later on he said, "I also have a gatha to present. Would you like to write it down on the wall for me? I will dictate it to you." The other novice was very surprised. "You who only work in the kitchen and do not know how to read and write, you have never met the teacher and yet you want to present a poem to compete with the highest monk?" And Hui Neng said: "Please don't look at the appearance, you have to look deeply, you have to go beyond the form." So the novice consented to help. That night, when everyone went to sleep, he brought Hui Neng to the wall and Hui Neng held a torch like this and the novice climbed on a high chair and Hui Neng dictated a gatha which goes like this:

"Body is not originally a tree."

The bright mirror is not really a mirror.

Since the very beginning nothing has existed. Where can the dust fall on?

He talked in the language of the Diamond Sutra: "A tree is not a tree, that is why it is a real tree." A mirror is not a mirror that is why it is a real mirror. In the morning everyone was so impressed, because compared with the other gatha, this is much deeper.

In the morning there was an atmosphere of excitement and there were monks who said: "We don't know who is the author of this new gatha. When I compare them, I see this new one is much deeper, the meaning is much more transcendent than the other gatha. When the Fifth Patriarch passed by, he saw a lot of talking going on and he said, "What happened?" And people told him about the second gatha. It was reported that he said, "This gatha is not to the point yet. This gatha is still weak; it does not express the Way, as it should. He used his sandal, his slipper, in order to wipe it away. Everyone said, "Well, if the master says that, it must be true that the second gatha has not met the expectation of the teacher. So they became peaceful and everyone continued to do his/her job. Later on, in the afternoon, the teacher went to the kitchen and saw Hui Neng working and he saw Hui Neng pounding the rice. The rice had to be pounded in order to taste more tender when cooked. He stopped by the place where Hui Neng was pounding the rice and asked, "Is the rice ready yet?" And Hui Neng said, "Yes, the teacher is ready." And it is said that the teacher knocked three times on the thing that was used to pound the rice and he left. At midnight of the same day Hui Neng presented himself to the place where the Fifth Patriarch used to sleep, because he understood that three sounds meant the third division of the night, midnight. He came to half open door of the teacher's room.

went in. There upon the teacher taught him the Diamond Sutra and gave him a gatha of Lamp Transmission and urged him to leave right away during that night. Because other monks would be jealous and they might run after him and take the robe and the bowl back. In the tradition, the teacher transmits to his heir his own robe and the begging bowl. The robe and bowl were given to Hui Neng, and he had to go south immediately and not to wait until the morning. In the early morning people did not see the teacher appear. They waited, waited and finally they found out that the Transmission had happened and the Dharma had gone south. A number of monks were very angry and tried to catch up with Hui Neng.

This story is very interesting. You can read it by yourself. I told you the story in order to share these gathas, because these gathas have something to do with the Dharma talk today. In the second gatha, the bodhi tree and the mirror are mentioned. The third line is about nothing exists, including the bodhi tree and the mirror. But the forth line is again dealing with the mirror only. If the mirror does not really exist, where could the dust fall on? First I would like to say that this is just a story. I don't believe that it actually took place. Because according to many researchers, there are several versions of the second gatha. But I would like to express my sympathy for the first poem. Because according to those who read the Platform Sutra, they always say that compared with Hung Neng's gatha, this one has not met the standard. What I like about this gatha is that it is very practical. It is said that your mind is like a mirror. It has a power of shining. But if you don't practice, if you allow forgetfulness, if you allow anger and wrong perceptions to cover up your mirror, then you will distort everything. Anger, like jealousy and craving will be born, because you have lost the power of shining of your own mirror or your mind. To practice the mindfulness trainings, to practice mindful sitting, mindful walking, and mindful eating is to have a chance to wipe away the dust of wrong perceptions. Then you will have a chance to let your own mirror shine brilliantly again. If the capacity to understand is there, the capacity of loving can also be there. That is why, although the first poem does not have balance concerning mind and body, the last sentence is very true and helpful. You have to live your life every day in mindfulness so you have a chance to rediscover your shining mind. With that shining mind you are free from the distortions of wrong perceptions. Anger, craving and other kinds of affliction will no longer bother you. You can make it possible for understanding and loving kindness to be reborn within yourself. As for the second gatha, it is magnificent. It is wonderful to say that looking into the bodhi tree you see that the bodhi tree is made of non-bodhi elements. You can look beyond the bodhi tree in order to realize the true nature of the bodhi tree. Looking at the bright mirror, deeply, you can see that understanding is made of non-understanding elements. You can even go beyond the bright mirror and not be caught up or attached to anything. This poem also expresses the wisdom of the Buddha, but I would like to say that without the first poem the second poem might not be very helpful.

In the history of Zen Buddhism people tend to support the teaching of of Zen transmitted by the southern school of Zen. The northern school of Zen embodied by Thanh Tu didn't last long, nor have many descendants to carry on the teaching. My insight is that Thanh Tu and Hui Neng should be brothers working hand in hand. While we praise the gatha given by Hui Neng, the sixth patriarch, we also have to offer incense to the gatha of Thanh Tu because it gives us very practical recommendations as how to practice in our daily life. Its meaning is that it is very easy for the dust of anger, hatred, craving to fall on our mirror at any time of the day. That is why practicing walking mindfully, eating mindfully and sitting mindfully is so crucial, and practicing the mindfulness trainings in our daily life is also a very fundamental practice. If we abandon that practice of mindfulness, if we only talk about the contents of the Diamond Sutra I'm afraid that we may lose the foundation, and we will not succeed in our attempt to transform the suffering in us.

**Dear Friends,**

**These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.**

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# Our Appointment with Life

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Dear Sangha, today is the sixteenth of July, 1998, and this is the first Dharma talk for the Summer Opening. I would like to invite the young people to meet together today, in order to discuss how to profit from the practice, from the Summer Opening, because there must be things that you like to do for your practice to be more fruitful, more joyful; and we have to meet about that. So the young people will find time to meet today and discuss these issues: do you like to practice with grown-up people, and how much do you want to share their practice? Of course, as young people you like to be together as a group, and you may like to have practices of your own, but from time to time you would also like to participate in the activities of other people. So, discuss how much you want to do on your own, and how much you want to do with other groups of people. Then I would like you to discuss joy and difficulties in your daily life, because I would like to know more about your daily life in order to offer the appropriate teaching and practices.

What are the kinds of difficulties you encounter in your daily life, in your family, in school? Please have a very thorough discussion, and write down all the kinds of difficulties that you encounter at home and in school. We have to be able to call these difficulties by their true names: what you don't like to happen in school, what you don't like to see happening in your family. I need you very much to tell me what kinds of difficulties you encounter at home, or in school, or in society. And then I would like you to tell me also about your daily joy and happiness, what kind of things you like in your family, in school and in society. Take time to sit quietly and recall, and to think, not as an individual but as a group, and each person will help the others to remember what kind of joy, what kind of happiness, what you like that happens at home, in society, in school. It is the opposite of what we just discussed before, when we mentioned what we dislike, and don't what to happen. The second topic is what is happening that you really like, in school, in society and in your family. Thirdly, I think this is important, what you really like, but it has not happened...what you wish to happen, but it has not happened, and what you think would be the conditions for it to happen.

I think you can discuss this among yourselves, as the young people, and then you can talk with other people, grownup people, and you will have a deeper view, a clearer view about what has been happening, and why the things you wish for have not happened. This discussion is already the practice of meditation, because to me, to meditate means to be still and to look deeply into our situation, to really find out what is there in our situation. And when you sit down together calmly and practice looking together, you will begin to see things more clearly. I would like you to record all that you have seen in your practice of collective looking.

I know that life is difficult sometimes, and as a young person you have already suffered. But the Buddha says that there is always a way out of suffering, but you cannot see that way out of suffering unless you see very clearly the nature of your difficulties. You are only eleven, or twelve, or thirteen, but you already suffer. You are fourteen, fifteen, or sixteen; you are almost an adult, yet you have the impression that life is already very difficult. All my life I have been in touch with young people. I have managed to always be in touch with young people. I like to listen to them, I like to understand their suffering, their difficulties; that is why I am very interested in hearing more about

what is really happening, and you are the ones who can help me. In retreats that I organize in many countries, I always welcome the young people to come and to practice with us. The presence of young people makes the retreats very alive. Your practice of looking deeply together will be a great help to me. However, if you think that today you cannot finish that practice of looking deeply at your difficulties and your joys, you can organize other meetings tomorrow and after tomorrow. And the fruit of your practice will be enjoyed by other groups that come after you. So please note, first of all, how much you want to practice with the adults, and how much you want to practice as a young group; the difficulties, the suffering that you encounter in your daily life, at home, at school, and in society; the kind of joy and happiness that you are able to have every day in school, in society, and at home; and finally, what you like, what you think to be wonderful, to be uplifting, to be nourishing, but which have not happened yet; and what kind of conditions you think you need in order for these things to happen.

For the very young people, I would like them to draw a wave for me, on paper. Do you know what a wave is? A wave is what you observe when you look at the ocean, at a river. You know that a wave is made of water. Try to draw the water also. It is very difficult—I don't know whether you can draw the water. I am sure that you can draw a wave, but without having succeeded in drawing in a wave, try to draw water. You think you can do it? There is one child who had drawn a wave, and I asked her, "What about the water?" She was very intelligent, and she pointed at the wave and she said, "This is water." But you may have other ideas. We know that water and wave cannot be separated. Sometimes the water is still, and sometimes it is not still. When it is not still, the water becomes waves. And when the water becomes still, what does it become? Can you draw it?

We have a poem that helps us to practice: "Breathing in, I see myself as a flower; breathing out, I feel fresh." And the young people can practice this. You breathe in and you visualize your self as a flower. "Breathing in, I see myself as a flower; breathing out, I feel fresh." I think the grownup people can practice this too. It's easy to see children as flowers. Everything in the child looks like a flower: their eyes are a kind of flower, their nose is a kind of flower too, their mouths, their hands, their feet, their faces look like flowers. So it would not be difficult to visualize yourself as a flower, because you are a flower by yourself. "Breathing in, I see myself as a flower." A flower is always fresh and beautiful. And that is one of the reasons I like to have children with us during retreats. These are flowers...we want to decorate the retreat with flowers, and children are also beautiful flowers. "Breathing in, I see myself as a flower; breathing out, I feel fresh." The grownup people are also flowers, but many of them don't know how to maintain their flower-ness. That is why their flower is somehow a little bit tired. So this practice is to restore your flower-ness, so that you'll be fresh again. You know that you can be fresh, like children, but because many of us have not had the opportunity to learn how to maintain our flower-ness, our flower has suffered. We also have beautiful eyes like children, but because we have cried so much, we did not sleep well so many nights, our eyes look tired. But if you know how to take care of your eyes, they will become flowers again. And so with your face, your face was originally a flower, but because you have not taken good care of your flower-ness, an expression of despair and fatigue makes your face look less than a flower. So this practice is very helpful: "Breathing in, I see myself as a flower"—you restore your flower-ness. "Breathing out, I feel fresh."

The second exercise is: "Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain." Believe it or not, inside of you there is a mountain, the element of solidity, stability—you cannot take the mountain out of you. There is a mountain in you: the capacity to be solid, to be stable.

Because we have not taken care of our mountain, we have lost a lot of that element of stability and solidity within us. So sit like a mountain again, learn how to sit like a mountain again, learn the half-lotus position, learn the lotus position, or learn the chrysanthemum position. Do you know what the chrysanthemum position is? That is the position that you find the most comfortable, with or without a cushion. So, "Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain; breathing out, I feel solid." Do you know that the sitting position is one of the most beautiful positions of the human body? A half-lotus, lotus or chrysanthemum—find a position that fits you the best, using a cushion or two. Your cushion might be more or less thick, but you have to try in order to find the cushion that fits you. When you have found the position, your chrysanthemum position with the cushion, I am sure you can sit for at least twenty minutes like a mountain. And sitting like that is a wonderful way to restore your mountain. We suffer because we are less than a mountain. We are shaky, we are vulnerable, but there is a mountain in us, and we have to restore it, and to practice sitting meditation is one of the ways to do it.

Children are capable of sitting also; if they don't sit half an hour, then they can sit two minutes, or three minutes. I'm sure all of you can sit like a mountain for two or three minutes. I'd like to see each of you sitting in that

breathing out, I feel solid." Solidity is one basic condition for happiness. If you are not solid, you suffer. So, restoring the element of solidity within you means that you can be happy right away. "Flower fresh, mountain solid."

(Bell)

Enjoy your breathing!

First of all, "Flower fresh, and then mountain solid." Now we come to the third exercise: "Water reflecting." "Breathing in I see myself as still water." You know still water is not a wave. Sometimes you enjoy being a wave—it's very wonderful to be a wave, coming up very high, and going down very low. But sometimes you are tired, you don't want to be a wave anymore. You just want to be still water. To be still water is also a great joy—you feel peaceful, you feel quiet, and you enjoy the peace and the quietness that is in you. I know the young people like to be waves, but they should know that it is also wonderful to be still water. Have you seen a pond that is very still? You look into the water and you see reflected in the water the blue sky, the clouds, the trees. You can even take a picture of the sky and the clouds just by pointing your camera at the water, because still water reflects things perfectly. Still water does not distort things. When you are not still, you distort things. When your mind is not still, you distort everything. The other person did not hate you, but you believe that she hated you. That is a distortion, because your "water," your mind, is not still. Therefore it is very important to practice so that your mind becomes still water. And now you know why I asked you to draw still water. "Breathing in, I see myself as still water; breathing out, I reflect things as they are." This is very important. We should not be victims of our wrong perceptions. In order for our perceptions not to be wrong, our minds should be still, like water. And there are ways to help your mind to become like still water.

The last exercise is: "Breathing in, I see myself as space; breathing out, I feel free." Space is very important. Imagine a bird without space. A bird without space could not fly; it would have to die. We humans are like birds: if there is no space around us we cannot move. If there is no place inside our hearts we also cannot move. So it is very important to practice in order to give us a lot of space inside, to practice in order to give our beloved one space so that she can move, so she can breathe. That is the practice of love. So you can ask yourself whether you love him, or whether you love her. If you love him, if you love her, you'll give him or her a lot of space, both inside and around him or her. It is very important to bring space into ourselves, and to restore space around us. And we will learn how to do it together.

I would like everyone to sing with me the song: "Flower Fresh," so that we memorize it, and we will begin to learn to practice like a flower, a mountain, still water, and space.

*Breathing in, breathing out,*

*Breathing in, breathing out,*

*I am blooming as a flower,*

*I am fresh as the dew.*

*I am solid as a mountain,*

*I am firm as the earth.*

*I am free.*

*Breathing in, breathing out.*

*Breathing in, breathing out.*

*I am water, reflecting*

*What is real, what is true.*

*And I feel there is space,*

*Deep inside of me.*

*I am free, I am free, I am free.*

Shall we sing it once more? I think we have to sing it in French.

Quand j'inspire, quand j'expire,

Quand j'inspire, quand j'expire,

Je me sens comme une fleur,

Aussi fraîche que la rose est.

Je suis solide comme une montagne,

Je suis ferme, comme la terre.

Je suis libre.

Quand j'inspire, quand j'expire,

Quand j'inspire, quand j'expire

Je suis l'eau reflectante

Ce qui est vrai, ce qui est beau.

Et je sens il y a de l'espace

Tres profonde en moi

Liberte, liberte, liberte.

I think we have other versions ready...today we shall learn the Italian version, the Vietnamese, and so on. Now I think it is time for the very young people to stand up and to bow to the Sangha and go out.

The transformation and healing we are looking for is not outside of us, it is in us. It is like the wave: if it wants to be still, the stillness should not be obtained from the outside, it is in the water itself.

We have the capacity to be a wave, but we also have the capacity to be still water. So we look for peace, we look for stability, we look for well being within ourselves, and these things are not something that we can acquire from outside. But maybe there are those of us who are only used to being waves, and we have forgotten how to become still water again. We know that we have the capacity of becoming still water again, but we have forgotten how to do it. That is why we need the practice. We need a teacher who will tell us how to restore our stability, our stillness. We need a Dharma brother, a Dharma sister, we need a Sangha in order to learn how to be stable and still again. Peace is first of all something that you are, not exactly something you do. That is why we like to use the expression "being peace," the way to be peace. Peace is there, only if we allow it to be, then it will be. Because we have not allowed peace to be, that is why peace is impossible. We cannot say that peace is not there, peace is there somehow, but we

the wave. That is why learning how to be peace, to allow peace to be, is very important. There is a kind of energy that is pushing us day and night, preventing our becoming peace. Within Buddhism that energy is called *vasana*, meaning, "habit energy." And we have to learn how to recognize it. We don't have to fight it, we have to learn how to recognize it in our daily life, and when we are able to recognize it and smile to it, it will lose its energy, and allow us not to be carried away by it. *Vasana*, "tap khi, this is like *chi gong*, khi energy, and "tap" means what you have learned so that it becomes a habit, so we translate it as "habit energy."

We have more than enough intelligence to know that if we say these words, then we will damage our relationship with the other person. Yet when the time comes, we cannot be ourselves--we say it. We know that we should not do it, because if we do it will cause damage to our relationship, and yet we do it. We say, "It was stronger than I am." What was stronger than you were? It is the habit energy. We know very well that we should not say these things, that we should not do these things; we know very clearly that saying it will destroy our relationship, will cause a lot of damage. Yet we find ourselves in the situation, and we say it, or we do it. And after the destruction, after the damage has been done, we regret a lot, and we say, "Why have I said that, done it? I already knew that if I said it, if I did it, I would cause damage, and yet I have said it, I have done it." And we promise to ourselves that we will not do it again, we will not say it again. We know that we are very sincere in that moment we want to begin anew. "That is the last time that will happen. I will never repeat that again." Yet, because the habit energy is always there, when you find yourself in the same kind of situation, you will say it again, you will do it again. And the damage continues, we know that it takes several months to repair the damage, yet it will take only a few minutes to cause the damage. We have learned the lesson, yet we cannot practice it, because the habit energy is so strong.

We are taught to practice mindfulness in order to recognize the habit energy every time it manifests. Mindfulness is also a kind of energy, the kind of energy that can help us become aware of what is going on, as when I look at my hand and I know that I am looking at my hand, that is mindfulness of looking. When I drink some water and I know that I am drinking water, that is mindfulness of drinking. When I walk, if I know that I am walking, that is mindfulness of walking. When I breathe, if I know that I am breathing, that is mindfulness of breathing. That is the practice that we do in Plum Village, in order to generate the energy of mindfulness. And the energy of mindfulness is the only kind of energy that can recognize the habit energy every time it is manifested. That is why the practice of mindful walking, mindful breathing, mindful eating is very important, because every moment you practice mindfulness of walking, or eating or breathing, you generate, you cultivate that energy of mindfulness in you. That energy is so important because it will help you to recognize what is going on, and therefore when the habit energy is manifested, we know right away. "Hello there, my habit energy, I know you." And you just smile to it, and then it cannot do anything to you anymore. There is no fight. It is not necessary to fight. The Buddhist way is very gentle, very non-violent. Just become aware of that habit, smile to it, "My dear friend, I know you," that is all, and your habit energy might go back to store consciousness a little weaker. And next time when it manifests itself you will say, "My dear little habit energy, I know you are there. I will take good care of you." Then it will go back to the store consciousness again.

I would like to tell you the story of a young man who came from America and practiced here, I think more than ten years ago. During the first three weeks, he enjoyed the practice so much. He enjoyed stability and joy during practice, because the practice of the Sangha in the Upper Hamlet was so strong. He was supported by monks and lay people who practiced here in the Upper Hamlet, and he was quite happy. One day he was sent by his fellow American practitioners to Ste. Foy-la-Grande, the town nearby, to do some shopping, because on that day we organized a Thanksgiving Day, and each national group was supposed to cook a dish typical of that nation to be placed on the ancestral altar. And he was sent by his American friends to Ste. Foy-la-Grande to do the shopping. It was the first time he had left the Upper Hamlet to go to a city. During the time he was shopping, he suddenly realized that he was rushing; there was no calm or stability anymore, because he wanted to get things done quickly. And that was not pleasant, because in the three weeks before he had not had that kind of feeling, that kind of energy. But since he had been practicing mindful breathing, he was able to recognize that the energy of rushing was in him, the energy of wanting to get things done very quickly was in him. He was capable of seeing that that energy had been transmitted to him by his mother, because his mother was always like that, always rushing and wanting to get things done very quickly. At that point he took a deep in-breath, and he said, "Hello, Mommy." And suddenly the energy of rushing was no longer there. And he knew that without the Sangha around him he should practice strongly, and he followed his mindful breathing until he finished the shopping, and from that moment on the energy of rushing was no longer with him.

When you are supported by a strong Sangha and a strong practice, the practice becomes very easy, and negative habit energies will have no occasion to manifest themselves. But when you find yourself alone, and you are not supported by the collective energy, these negative habit energies can spring up and manifest themselves, and you have to be equipped with enough mindfulness in order to be able to recognize them, and not to let them lead you and push you to do things that you don't want to do, to say things that you don't want to say.

When you practice mindful breathing and mindful walking, you allow peace to be. The negative energies are still in you, but they do not manifest themselves. If you continue, if your practice works out, then the negative energies will be transformed little by little in the depth of your consciousness. They are transformed in two ways. The first way is that when they manifest themselves, you recognize them, you smile to them, and every time you do that they will go back to the form of seeds in the lower level of your consciousness and they will lose some of their strength, through the phenomenon of discharge. Your habit energy will still be there, but it will lose a little bit of strength every time it is embraced by your mindfulness. So the next time it manifests itself, you do the same, you embrace it, you recognize it, and it loses a little bit of strength and it goes back to the lower level of your consciousness. And that is the first way to help it to transform.

The second way is that you continue to cultivate the energy of peace, the energy of mindfulness, and during one hour of walking meditation or mindful breathing, you nourish and you cultivate the energy of peace and mindfulness in you, because the energies of peace and mindfulness also have their own seeds in the lower level of your consciousness. And these seeds continue to grow in you, and when they are important, they know how to take care of the opposite kinds of seeds. You don't have to directly touch the negative seeds. You cultivate only the positive energies in you, and during the time you sleep, during your daily life, the positive seeds, the seeds of peace and stability, will know how to take care of the negative seeds, and there will also be a transformation, even if you don't directly deal with them. I have many stories to tell about this.

When I was first exiled from my country in 1966, when the war in Vietnam had become very intense, I had to leave the country for a few months in order to go to Europe and the United States to advocate for a cease-fire, for the stopping of the war. Because I tried to speak with the voice of the victims of the war and not the voice of the warring parties, I was not allowed to go home, and I was exiled from my own country. It was very hard for me. At that time all my friends were in Vietnam, all my work was in Vietnam, and it was very difficult to survive if I did not go home. Everything in Europe and America was very strange to me. There were no Vietnamese refugees abroad yet. I had to travel extensively in order to speak about the situation in Vietnam, and I stayed two or three days in each city. Sometimes I woke up during the night and I did not know what city or what country I was in, because of the extensive speaking tour.

During the first year of my exile I used to dream of going home. The same dream came back again and again. Usually I saw a beautiful hill, a green hill, with beautiful trees and little houses on it, and I was climbing on it. I knew that everything I loved was on that hill: my friends, my work, the people I loved, they were all on that hill. And always, halfway up, there was something preventing me climbing anymore. And I always woke up at that moment, and realized I was exiled. The same kind of dream came back again and again. But at that time I was already practicing mindfulness, recognizing what was happening in the present moment. I learned to appreciate the trees, the birds, the fruits, the people, and the children in Europe and America. In Vietnam we had different kinds of trees, fruit and birds. I spent time with children in Germany, in France, in England and in America, and I talked to and made friends with pastors, Catholic priests and all those who would like to support me in helping end the war. I continued to make friends; I continued to learn how to appreciate what was there in the present moment. The practice brought fruit, because that dream did not come back any more. It looks like I have adopted this part of the world as my home also. I did not meditate on the dream. No, I did not analyze my dream. I did not invite my dream up in order to have a talk with it, I did not do any of that work. I just tried to live mindfully each minute of my daily life in Europe and in America, and I was able to touch what was wonderful, beautiful, refreshing here in this part of the world, and I cultivated this kind of joy and relationship. It was exactly that joy and relationship that took care of my pain of being in exile, and I experienced a transformation deep down in store consciousness. I did not work on it intellectually at all.

So transformation and healing can happen in two ways: the first way is that you directly embrace it and look deeply into it. The second way is to just cultivate the positive energy of peace, of solidity, of joy, and then they will know how to take care of the negative energy within you. So, the habit energy that we have within us...if we allow it to



those we love. That is why we have to learn how to be able to recognize and to transform it, and you know already that the factor that can recognize that habit energy, the factor that can embrace that energy and help it to transform, is the energy of mindfulness. That is why one hour of mindfulness practice is one hour of cultivating that energy. That is why, when we come to Plum Village, we should invest our time and our energy in the practice of mindfulness, so that when we go home we will be able to continue, because that is the only energy that can help us with transformation and healing. I used to tell Catholic and Protestant friends that, to me, the energy of mindfulness is equivalent to the energy of the Holy Spirit, and we are capable of generating that Holy Spirit within ourselves.

(bell)

Habit energy manifests itself several times a day. If you are attentive, you will recognize it, in your way of walking, for instance. There is a belief that what you are looking for is not here, it is somewhere in the future. You believe that the things you want, whether it is peace, or happiness, or stability or freedom or God or the Buddha, are not available in the here and the now. So there is a belief that you have to look for them somewhere else, or in the future. That is why the way you walk is conditioned by that kind of belief. You walk as if peace and happiness are not available in the here and the now. That habit energy can be seen in every step you make. You run...and we have been running for a long time, not only during this life, but in previous lives we have been running, because the habit of running was there in our ancestors and in our parents. They still continue to run in us. Even when we sit down and eat our lunch, they continue to run, to run inside. We are not capable of eating our lunch in peace. There are those of us who practice strongly—once they sit down, they want to be there. And they want to enjoy their lunch with the brothers and sisters who have come, and to enjoy the practice with them. There is a strong determination to stop in the here and the now, and to live deeply this moment of your daily life. So, sitting like a mountain, do not allow the past and the future to carry you away. Bring your mind back to your body, and sit there as if sitting there is the most important thing of your life. And when you eat your lunch, eat your lunch in such a way that peace and joy are possible. And in order to really do that, you have to stop running.

When one hundred people, three hundred people are sitting together and eating lunch together, a number of us are capable of sitting still in the present moment, not allowing any projects, any worries to invade us. Just sitting there and establishing ourselves in the here and the now, because sitting with the Sangha is a joy, by itself. While we eat, we touch deeply the food that is a gift of earth and sky, of the cosmos, and we just enjoy our sitting and our eating, our breathing. We enjoy our life, expressed in our presence and in the presence of brothers and sisters who surround us. The only condition for that to be possible is to stop running. We have been running for a long time, and even during our sleep we continue to run. Learning to stop is the most important practice of Buddhist meditation. To stop on the ground of the insight that what you are looking for is already there in the present moment, in the here and the now. The Buddha was very clear about it. Do not allow the past to get you, don't be attached to the past because the past is already gone. Do not allow the future, worries about the future, to get you, because the future is not yet here. There is only one moment for you to be truly alive, and that is the present moment. All the wonders of life can be touched in that moment. So the Buddha was clear on that. Everything belonging to life is there in the present moment; the blue sky, the beautiful face of your child is there, available in the present moment. If you get lost in the future, in worries about the future, or in sorrow about the past, life will not be available to you. So the basic condition is to go back to the present moment, to allow yourself to be touched by the wonders of life.

There are elements that are beautiful, refreshing and healing. If we allow ourselves to be touched by these elements, we can restore our well being, our peace. How can we do that, unless we learn how to stop running, to allow our bodies to rest, to be in the here and now, and to allow our mind to be present, to touch life. And this is our practice. When we find ourselves alone, and try to practice according to the teachings in a book, it may be difficult. But when we find ourselves in a Sangha where everybody is doing that, then it will be very easy, like walking meditation. You know that the monks and the nuns and the lay people who are permanent residents in Plum Village practice walking meditation every day. Every time they need to go from one place to another place, even if the distance is only two or three meters, they always practice walking meditation. There is no other style of walking but mindful walking. You walk in such a way that every step can bring you solidity and peace. It is not only during retreats that we practice like that, but outside of retreats we always walk like that, because you can enjoy every step you make. Every step, make it more solid. Every step, make it more peaceful. And you cultivate peace and solidity with every step you make. If you are a visitor coming to Plum Village, and you see everyone is walking that way, then you can do it very easily because you are reminded by everyone. Everyone is a bell of mindfulness, calling you back to the practice of mindful walking. And when you walk, and experience the peace and the joy, you become a bell of

mindfulness yourself. And when we see you walking like that, we have confidence. If it happens that we get lost in our worries, in the past, in the future, and we see you walking like that, we have a chance to come back to the here and the now and enjoy our steps also. That is the virtue of a Sangha.

What we enjoy here in Plum Village, when we come, is the presence of the Sangha. A teacher without a Sangha cannot do much. Therefore, take refuge in the Sangha, have confidence in the Sangha, surrender yourself to the Sangha, and allow the Sangha to transport you like a boat on the ocean. That is our practice. Don't worry, we know that our practice is to cultivate mindfulness. That is why during the time of eating, we eat in such a way that mindfulness is there. It means body and mind united, you are really there in the present moment, and you enjoy your lunch, and you enjoy the brothers and sisters around you. Please do not think of the past, of the future, of anything—just sit there, allow yourself to be there. Simply being there, eat in such a way that peace and happiness are possible, and the place will become the Pure Land, the Kingdom of God. Whether the place is Hell or the Kingdom of God depends entirely on you. If you can dwell in the here and the now, if you can let peace and solidity and freedom be the energies nourishing you in that moment, then the piece of land you are walking on, sitting on, is the Pure Land, the Kingdom of God. Everything depends on us.

In the meditation hall, we sit and we walk. What is the purpose of sitting and walking? Sitting is to cultivate our stability, our solidity. The sitting is not an exercise for you to arrive at a certain state of mind. This means that you have to enjoy the sitting, sitting just for sitting. And the moment when you enjoy the sitting, joy and stability become a reality already. When we are a wave, let us be a real wave. When we want to be still water, we can enjoy being still water. To be a wave is wonderful, but to be still water is also wonderful. Sitting is to allow our bodies to be quiet, to be solid, and to allow our minds to be at one with our bodies. While we sit we might enjoy our breathing, because our breathing will bring our minds and bodies together, and will help keep our minds and bodies together. Every moment of our sitting and breathing can be a moment of joy and peace. If you sit as though at hard labor, it will not result in anything at all. So the problem is not to sit a lot, but to enjoy the sitting, and to make the sitting pleasant.

We should use our intelligence in order to do sitting meditation. It is like when you stand and contemplate a beautiful sunset. If I ask you, "What is the purpose of standing here and looking at a sunset?" you don't see any purpose—you just stand there enjoying the beautiful sunset. Sitting is like that. If someone says, "Why do you sit like that? What is the purpose of sitting like that?" you could say, "I just enjoy sitting." That is the best way of sitting, to just enjoy sitting. You know, when Nelson Mandela, the president of South Africa, first came for an official visit to France, he was met by the press, and the members of the press asked him what he would most like to do now, and he said, "Just sit down, because since the time I got out of prison I have not had a chance to sit down and do nothing." And now Plum Village offers you that opportunity, just to sit down and do nothing. Sitting down and doing nothing like that, if you enjoy it, will promote a lot of transformation and healing.

So in our Dharma discussions, please do not venture into areas of speculation, but bring our experiences together related to how we can better enjoy our sitting, our breathing, our walking and our eating together. The energy that helps you to succeed in enjoyment is mindfulness, because mindfulness is the capacity of being there, body and mind united, so that you can touch life deeply in that moment.

The energy of mindfulness can be generated by mindful walking, it can be generated by mindful breathing. It can be generated by doing things, or by mindful eating, mindful working, mindful walking, mindful sitting, mindful breathing. Mindfulness as I define it is the energy that can help you to be there, in the here and the now. From time to time, we see a person sit there, but he is not really there. His body is there, but he is completely absent. We can come and pat on his shoulder and say, "Anybody home?" and then he'll come back to us. So mindfulness is to be there, body and mind united in the here and the now. Mindfulness is the capacity to recognize what is there. Because you have to be there first, and when you are there something else is also there, and that is life. The beautiful sunset is not for you if you are not there. The blue sky is not for you if you are not there. And the multitude of wonderful, refreshing and healing elements will not be for you if you are not there. This by itself is a gift, because when you love someone, the most precious thing you would like to offer to her or to him is your presence, because how can you love unless you are there? Please look deeply to see it: the most valuable gift you can make to your beloved one is your presence. Therefore, to be present means to be loving. "Darling I am here for you." That is the most meaningful statement of love. If you are not there, if you are always absent, if the place you are used to going is the past or the future, then you cannot love. When you are there, you can offer your presence as

person that you love will have the feeling that she is ignored by you, she does not mean anything to you. That is why, when you are there, you are in a position to recognize what is there, and what is there is your beloved one, it is life. The Buddha said, life is available only in the here and now, and your appointment with life is in the present moment. If you miss the present moment, you risk your appointment with life. So the teaching is very clear and also very simple: that we should train ourselves to go home to the here and the now, and touch deeply the life that is available in that moment. And everything we do, walking, sitting, breathing, eating, is to realize that.

(Three bells)

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# Protecting Families from Being Broken

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Dear Sangha, today is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 1998, and we are in the Lower Hamlet. Today we are going to speak and listen to Vietnamese.

There was a mother lion who was looking for something to eat. She was a future mother—she was pregnant—but she hadn't given birth to the baby lion yet. That morning, the mother lioness was running after a deer. The deer knew there was a lioness running after her, so she ran very fast. She didn't know whether she would get away from the lioness, or not, because she was still quite a small deer. Although the mother lion was quite strong, she was rather heavy, because she was carrying this baby lion cub in her womb.

She ran after the deer for a long time, fifteen minutes, and still the lioness had not caught up with the deer. Then they came to a ditch, and the little deer jumped across the ditch and got over to the other side. The lioness was very unhappy, because she was hungry, she needed food not only for herself, but also for the cub in her womb. So she made a tremendous effort to jump over that ditch, and the lioness put her two back legs on the ground, and put all her energy into jumping. But a misfortune happened, and she lost her lion cub. The cub fell from her body, and fell deep into the ditch. The mother lion had jumped to the other side, when she realized that she had lost her cub. The misfortune had happened— she had lost that little cub she had been waiting for, for so long, that she loved so much, just because of one moment of forgetfulness. She had forgotten that she had this cub in her womb and that she had to be very careful. She had just forgotten that for a minute, and so she couldn't keep the lion cub. Only one moment of not being mindful, and she had lost her little cub.

After she had jumped over the ditch, the lioness didn't want anything. She wasn't interested in following the deer anymore. She didn't want anything to eat, or anything to drink. She thought that her life wasn't worth living any more. The little lion cub that she had loved, that she had been waiting for, for so many months, she had lost. He had fallen into the ditch, and the ditch was very deep. He must have died in falling like that, and so she just stood on the other side of the ditch and cried. This is the story that the Buddha tells in the sutra, and today I am telling you children this story.

This mother lioness went home to her cave, and for four or five days she didn't drink or eat anything. She didn't feel hungry at all, because the suffering in her heart was so great. She had lost her cub, and so she didn't want anything else. The cub was her reason for living; he was her love, so how could she be happy when she had lost the little cub?

But in the end she felt less sad, and a week later, she started hunting again. This time she went hunting because she was so hungry. Now she could run quite fast, because she didn't have the cub, and she was able to catch her prey quite quickly. She carried on like this for a whole year. Then, one day she was walking in the woods, and she saw a little lion who was climbing up a tree, with a lot of monkeys. This lion was very good at climbing trees; he was as

good as the monkeys.

The mother lioness thought, "That is my lion cub that I thought was dead. But look! He is alive." And that was the truth. When that little lion fell into the ditch, there was a big monkey up in the trees who saw what was happening, and went and picked up the little lion cub and took him home and looked after him, giving him monkey milk to drink. That is the reason that the lion cub grew up. He learned how to climb up trees, and he learned how to be vegetarian, since lions usually aren't vegetarian. But this little lion only ate fruit and leaves, just like the monkeys. Instead of learning how to roar, he learned how to make a noise like *chkk-chkk-chkk-chkk*, like a monkey makes, and he was very happy living and playing with the monkeys. The mother monkey loved this little lion just as much as she loved her own monkey children. The lion and the monkeys lived together like brothers and sisters, and there wasn't any discrimination between them. The little lion cub didn't suspect that he was a lion. He just thought that he was a monkey, and that he was the child of the mother monkey. How could he know that his mother was a lioness, and that he too was a lion?

That day this lioness was walking through the woods, and she saw her child climbing up the trees and playing with the monkeys. Then she knew, "My little cub is still alive. But now he has grown used to being like a monkey." So the mother lion didn't say anything straight away. She was making a plan for how to bring the lion cub home, because she had not been the mother all this time.

Therefore, the lioness waited for a day when the monkeys weren't around, and she went to the baby lion and she said, "Do you know that you are a lion? That you are my child?" She said it in the lion language, and then the little lion said, "You are not my mother. You don't look like my mother—my mother looks quite different. My mother gives me milk to drink, my mother holds me in her arms and takes me up in the trees. So how do you dare come and say that you are my mother. I am very angry with you!" This is what the little lion said.

The lioness knew that she had made a mistake—this was a very clumsy way of saying it. She shouldn't have said it straight out like that; she should have said it much more skillfully. So, she went away and she started to think again. I don't know whether she was doing walking meditation, but she was walking quite slowly. She was thinking, "How can I make acquaintance with my lion cub, and bring him back home, so we can live together with love?"

She waited for fifteen days, and then she saw that little lion cub again, and he was on his own. In a very polite way she said, "Little one, are you feeling happy today? I'm very honored to see you again. I'm sorry that the other day I thought you were my child, but in fact I was wrong. You are a very beautiful little monkey, and I want to be your friend, so we can play together."

The little lion, when he heard this, felt very happy about it, and he said, "Good, now this lady accepts that I am a monkey. I can't put up with being told I'm a lion." So he said, "Okay, I agree. I'm happy to be your friend. But on one condition—you mustn't ever call me a lion. I'm a monkey, and you must call me monkey."

So the mother lioness said, "Yes, that's right. Of course, you are not my child, you are a monkey, and you are the child of a beautiful mother monkey." Thanks to this kind speech, the mother was able to make friends with the little lion. They had just played for a few minutes, and then the lioness said, "Okay, let's leave each other now for the time being, and I'll come back and play with you another day." Therefore the little lion felt very happy: "This lioness is very polite, she doesn't force me to do anything, it's fun to play with her."

Then one day the mother lion asked the little lion to come and play a long way away, because they had started to be quite close to each other. The mother lion had been quite patient, because she knew that if she was not patient, there would be no way for her to bring her lion cub home, to become part of her family, to meet the father lion, and live in the lion community. Therefore the lioness was very careful, she used very gentle words, and she was very patient. Then she asked the lion cub to come and play quite a long way away, and they came to a river, a very clear stream of water. And the mother lioness said, "Little one, please have some water to drink, because we are thirsty after having played so long." While they were drinking the water, the reflection of the mother lioness and the little lion cub could be seen in the water. They looked down in the water and they could see the reflection of themselves very clearly—on the one side there was the little lion cub, and on the other the lioness. Suddenly an idea came into the mother lioness's head. She said, "Let's not drink any more water, and let's just look at ourselves in the mirror of the water."

lion cub was that he was seeing in the water. When he looked up, he just saw one lion, but when he looked into the river, he saw a lion and a lion cub. Then, the lioness mother had a very skillful idea, and she put out her tongue, and she said to the little lion, "Put out your tongue," and he saw the lion cub putting out his tongue. Then the lion cub started to have doubts about being a monkey. He thought, "Maybe I'm not a monkey after all."

Then the mother lioness lifted up her front paw, and pressed down on the water, and said to the lion cub, "Please do the same thing with your paw." The lion cub saw the reflection of a lion cub lifting up a front paw and putting it down into the water. Then the lion mother opened her mouth very wide, and he saw in the river a lioness opening her mouth very wide. Then she said to the lion cub, "Open your mouth wide." He saw in the river a lion cub opening his mouth wide.

Then the mother saw that the lion cub was beginning to see that he was a lion, and so she felt that the transformation had taken place. So the lioness roared, and put her two back legs on the ground and jumped over to the other side. The lion cub did the same thing, and he roared like a lion. It was the first time he hadn't made noise like a monkey, but made a noise like a lion. He jumped over to the other side just like his mother, and then he knew that he was a lion cub. The mother lion went in front, and the lion cub ran behind, and the two went back to the cave of the lioness. We should remember that this story was told by the Buddha to his students.

(Bell)

The mother lioness knew how to breathe, and the lion cub should also know how to breathe. So from that day the lioness began to teach the lion cub the behavior of lions: how to walk, how to stand, how to lie down and sit like a lion, to speak like a lion, to roar like a lion. She taught the lion cub how to jump high in the air, how to jump over rivers and over fallen trees, and to run after prey. This training lasted many weeks, but the lion cub learned quickly, and in three weeks he was able to do everything, which the mother lioness did. It was like a twenty-one day retreat. We can learn everything in those twenty-one days.

After the lion cub grew up and became a real lion, he sat next to his mother, and said to her, "I know I am a lion, and I am not a monkey. But I still love my monkey family. I know that if that monkey family hadn't been there, I would be dead. I love my monkey mother, I love my monkey brothers and sisters, so please mother, let me go home and visit my monkey mother who brought me up."

Therefore the mother knew that her cub was already old enough to go back and visit her monkey family. She said, "Yes, you should go back and see them, because they taught you many good things. You learned things that I can't do. For instance, eating fruits, and climbing up trees. You can do that, but I still have to learn those things. You miss your monkey family, and you feel grateful to them, and that's very good. So I'm very happy for you to go back and visit your monkey-mother and monkey-brothers and sisters".

The young lion was very happy. He was able to live the life of a lion and the life of a monkey. The life of a lion has wonderful things in it, and the life of a monkey also has wonderful things in it. When they had a lot of meat to eat in the lion family, he thought, "Oh, before I used to eat just fruit." And he saw that there was a difference between himself and the lioness. The lioness just knows how to eat meat, and had never eaten anything else. But the small lion knew how to eat things such as fruits, and most lions never know how to eat fruits. They never experience that. So this little lion, with the experience of being both monkey and lion, had a lot of happiness. In the first place, the mother and father of this lion loved him, and he didn't have one mother—he had two mothers, and both mothers loved and understood him. When he went back to the monkey family and told them the whole story of what had happened, the monkey mother was very happy, and was happy to allow the lion to go back and live with his lion family. She didn't try to force him to stay with the monkey family. She said, "Please, go back home and live with your lion family. Come and visit me and your brothers and sisters here from time to time." So the young lion was very happy.

The Buddha said that all of us come from a good lineage. We have the capacity to be happy, to be free, to be solid. But because we live in a society, which is not favorable to our progress, we forget that we can live happily as free people, solidly. We can take solid steps like a free person, like an enlightened person. We can sit solidly like a lion, without being afraid of anything. We can walk, stand, sit and lie down like an enlightened person, and in this process of walking, sitting and lying down like this, we can have a great deal of happiness, solidity and freedom. But we have been trained in such a way that we don't act like that. So when we have breakfast, for example, we

don't know how to eat our breakfast. We eat our breakfast without being solid, without being free. When we take our bottle of milk, and we pour it into our bowl, we are thinking about something else. We allow our sadness, our anger or our worries to obscure us. We do not have the capacity to pick up our jug of milk and our bowl like a free person. We don't have the capacity to pour the milk out and stay in the present moment at the same time. When we are pouring milk like this, we don't know that this is the milk made for us by the cow, and that the farmer has milked the cow. Our mind is somewhere else. And we put down the jug of milk, and we keep thinking about this, that, and the other, and we are completely unable to be aware of the real present moment. When we are eating a piece of bread, or dipping our bread into our milk, or we are stirring chocolate or cocoa into our milk, and putting a lot of sugar into our milk, we are not aware of that, because we don't know how to stay in the present moment. The milk is very good, the bread is very good, but we eat it as if it's not good at all.

Today I had my breakfast with a novice monk, and we sat very still, looking out of a large window at the view outside. We sat very solidly, and I poured the milk in a very mindful, very leisurely way. I saw the milk as real milk, coming from the cow, and I felt very grateful. I felt very happy that today I can drink a glass of milk. I only drink a little glass of milk, and I don't put any sugar in it. I break off a piece of bread, and I smell the bread, and I see that the bread is very fragrant, and then I bite it off, and I chew it. I know that I am chewing bread, and I know that outside the window there is the blue sky, there is the forest, there are the birds singing, and I dwell in the present moment, and I see that this piece of bread that's in my mouth tastes so good. I don't chew it twice and then swallow it; I chew it thirty, forty, fifty times, and this bread becomes very sweet and very tasty. When I dip the bread into my bowl of milk—this is just a bowl of milk, there's no sugar in it, there's no cocoa in it, there's no chocolate in it—and when I put the bread in my mouth, I see the richness of the milk, the fragrance of the milk, and I chew the milk as well. Have you ever chewed milk? Or do you just know how to drink milk? Milk is to be chewed, and when you put the bread into the milk and then suck the milk out of it, you chew it thirty or forty times, and quite naturally it will be very, very tasty. A hundred or two hundred times more tasty than if you just put it in your mouth quickly and swallow it straight away. So I think I have to invite you children to come to my hut and eat the bread like this.

When I chew bread I say to myself, "I have arrived. I am home, here and now, solid, free." Or I say, "Here is the Pure Land, the Pure Land is here." Smiling in mindfulness, I stay in the present moment, and as I chew I am really there in the present moment. I am a free person; I feel very light. Every moment of eating bread like that is a moment of great happiness, so much happiness. I don't have to think, "Oh, dear, in a minute I have to go down to the Lower Hamlet and give a Dharma Talk, and then I have to lead walking meditation." I don't think about the future. Now I am eating my breakfast, and I have to eat my breakfast in such a way that I can be happy, that I can be a free person. I know that I don't need to eat very much, I just need to eat very carefully, I need to chew very carefully. I need to dwell in the present moment, and then the taste of the bread and the milk is very good, a hundred times better than if I didn't eat carefully. I don't need to eat very much. I just need a piece of bread about two or three inches long. I just have twenty mouthfuls of bread, and a small bowl of milk, without any chocolate, without any jam. It's only when we eat quickly that we need jam and chocolate, because we don't get the sweetness when we eat so quickly. I used to eat a little butter, but nowadays I don't eat butter any more, and I never have cocoa or chocolate, and I never have jam. But my breakfast is very good, very tasty. Maybe if you looked at my breakfast, you wouldn't think that it looked very tasty, but if you eat it like I eat, then it will be very tasty.

Now, let's think how they eat their breakfast in the town. They eat it in such a rush. They eat it like a thief, a thief who doesn't have time to sit down and eat, who hasn't got time to sit down and see the other person who is sitting opposite. They don't see the person sitting next to them, they don't see the person in front of them, and they do not see the food either, because their head is completely obscured by their ideas, by their worries, by their sadness, by their anger. Sometimes we are so angry that we pick up our newspaper and we hold it in front of our faces at breakfast time, so that we don't have to look at anybody else. We've seen these people enough all ready, we don't want to see them anymore, so we pick up the newspaper and put it in front of our faces. That means that in our breakfast we have an extra, unnecessary ingredient, and that is the newspaper. What do we need a newspaper for when we're having breakfast? We can't eat properly, we can't look at our family properly, and then everybody goes off in their own direction. In the morning we would have a wonderful opportunity to sit together and look at each other, but we don't do it. We would be so happy if we could stop and look at each other. All day we're running around doing this, that, and the other, like we're in a dream.

I remember that when I was in New York, I was having my breakfast, and somebody brought me a newspaper—the Sunday "New York Times." Do you know how heavy it is? It weighs two kilos. (Laughter.) How can you eat your

eat that for breakfast? I did not understand New Yorkers when I was given that breakfast. How many forests do you need to cut down to make a newspaper like that? Many people buy the newspaper, but they don't read it, they just look at it a little bit, or they just use it to hold up in front of their faces so they don't have to look at their family members. Do you know what kind of advertisements they use to advertise the New York Times? They say "You don't have to read it all, but it's nice to know that it's there." That's how they advertise it, so we feel that if we don't buy the New York Times we're a little bit odd, and there may be some news that we don't know about that everybody else knows about, so we feel that we have to buy it.

Our way of life in New York is not the way of life of a happy person, of a free person, of a solid person. So we have to learn how to live like a solid, free person. Now it's time for the small children to go out.

(Bell)

Because of mistakes of our mother or our father, or our grandparents, we forget our roots, where we come from. We forget that our ancestors are the Buddha, the bodhisattvas, those who had the capacity to live happily, solidly, and as free people. So we run around, and we drown in our suffering. The Buddha and the bodhisattvas have manifested like these mother lionesses, looking for their children whom they have lost. The Buddhas and the bodhisattvas are full of patience, and all of us are the lion cubs who have lost our home. We have to be skillful, intelligent, finding a way back to our home.

We have the capacity to be happy, to be peaceful, to be free, yet living our daily lives, we suffer we drown. Under the burden of our suffering, we make those around us suffer too. Now we have to return to our true parents, learn how to walk again, learn how to stand again, learn how to sit again, learn how to lie down again, learn how to speak, learn how to listen again, in order to revive the behavior of a real lion. While we have lost our way, we have not yet been able to learn, or we have forgotten the customs, the ways, the life, which can bring us the quality of happiness which we should be enjoying.

If we are Jewish, our ancestors are the patriarchs Abraham and the matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca and Ruth. Our ancestors had their own precepts, and they were able with those precepts to maintain their happiness and solidity with their own society. But because of some mistakes, some clumsiness of our parents or our ancestors, we have forgotten about our roots, and we have been wandering around in the world without remembering our roots, and therefore we have suffered.

Our ancestors may include Jesus Christ, and so many generations have followed the culture and the spiritual teachings of the lord Jesus Christ. They have been happy because of this. They have known how to love, and how to take refuge in each other because of these teachings. But because of some mistakes of a couple of generations, mistakes the church has made, we have left our congregations, we have left our church. We have been angry with our congregation, and we have been looking for a different spiritual path. We have been looking for Buddhism, and we have been looking for Hinduism, and we have thought that happiness cannot be in our Christian roots.

Perhaps we are Vietnamese, and because of some great misfortune, some mistakes of our leaders, we have had to leave our native land, go to a life very strange to us, learn how to stand, walk, think and behave in a way which is not the way of our ancestors. And we have brought suffering and afflictions into our minds and our bodies while we have wandered from our native land. We don't know that we have these roots. We think that we are a different species, and we don't think about going back to our roots.

We are a lotus flower with wonderful color and scent, but we have lost the fragrance and the color of a lotus, we do not recognize the fragrance of the lotus as our fragrance. We go and buy some perfume and put it on us, and we say that that is our own flower's fragrance, and in the process of drifting like this we have learned many negative things in the new society we have come to. The beautiful things of that society do exist. They are in our new environment, but in order to learn these beautiful and good things of the new society, we need someone to direct us. The American culture has very beautiful and wonderful aspects about it, which we can learn, appreciate, and make use of, just as the lion cub can learn some wonderful things from the monkey family. But because we have no one to guide us or direct us, we allow all the garbage of the Western society in which we are living to fill us up. We do not pick out the jewels of the Western society, we only take the garbage of the Western society, and put it into ourselves. The hardships and misfortunes of drug taking, of sexual misconduct, are the garbage of Western culture. When we pour these things into our hearts and our minds, we will suffer in our bodies and our minds, and we will make our



parents suffer, and our ancestors suffer.

We don't know that there are jewels; there are values in Western society, which we can learn about in order to enrich our own culture. We should know that in our own culture, in the Vietnamese culture, there are jewels too, and we have to gather these together and learn about them, because we come from this culture, that is our base. But because we are angry with our parents, we cannot communicate with our parents. Therefore our parents are not able to transmit to us the jewels, the precious things of our heritage and our tradition.

If mother and father cannot speak to their children, how can they transmit to them the values and virtues, which have been handed down in our tradition for so many generations? But there is a great gap between the young and the older generation. One of the reasons for this is that the older generation is so busy, has so many occupations, and the younger generation is so busy as well. All day the father and mother are very busy, and all day the children are very busy, and when they come home in the evening they are all so tired, and they may be irritated; annoyance arises because of the tiredness. Neither side knows how to listen deeply, how to use loving and harmonious speech. Therefore, the gap between the two generations grows greater every day, and suffering arises in the younger generation, and suffering is in the heart of the older generation as well. In the end the younger generation is not able to look at the older generation, and father and mother are not able to look at their children, because both have suffered from each other so much. We have not yet been able to receive ways of life, which come from our native culture, spiritual culture, and therefore we do not know the art of living. And in this kind of forgetfulness, this foolishness, this clumsiness, we make mistakes, just as when the mother lioness jumped across the river and in a moment of forgetfulness allowed her lion cub to fall into the ditch.

How many mothers and fathers suffer because they have lost their children? Why have they lost their children? Because they have been thoughtless, because they are clumsy. This does not only apply to Vietnamese parents, but it applies to Western parents as well. Because so many Western parents are so busy, they are not mindful, they are clumsy, and therefore they have lost their children too. Although the Western people do not have the same culture as the Vietnamese people, they have lost their son; they have lost their daughter, just like the Vietnamese people who came to live in the West. The Vietnamese people have more suffering than the Western people do, because not only do they have suffering caused by the generation gap, but they also have the suffering caused by the cultural gap. Although the Western people do not have this gap between two cultures, as experienced by the Vietnamese people, they do have the generation gap suffering. Maybe the culture of this generation is not the same as the culture of the preceding generation, and the father and mother cannot accept the culture of the new generation. Hairstyles are so different between the young and the old people, and just the matter of hairstyle is enough to make parents angry with their children. Young Vietnamese people have the culture of the West, and the music that the young people listen to is enough to give a headache to the older generation. Parents are so surprised that their children are able to listen to this kind of music. It is not only the Vietnamese families living in the West who have this problem of cultural gap, but it is a gap that Western families have as well.

It is a very difficult situation when mother and father cannot look at their children anymore, cannot feel happy looking at each other anymore, so that when we have a meal together we do not feel happy. Because we don't feel happy, we have to put the newspaper in front of our eyes, so we don't see the other members of our family. There are families where people don't like looking at each other anymore, and they just want to look in one direction. That is not the direction of their common ideal that is the direction of the television. They want to look in the direction of the television in order to suffer less and to forget their suffering. They are running away. They are running away from reality—the reality, which includes suffering. Looking at our dear ones, we don't see them as very dear anymore. That face is full of suffering, and when that person looks at us, that person just sees nothing but suffering in our face. Therefore, we have a sort of secret agreement that we will both look at the television, so that we don't have to suffer any more. That is the truth of what happens in so many families, and we pretend that this isn't happening. Now we have to be brave, we have to have the courage to look at the truth, look straight into the face of the truth, and ask ourselves the question, why? Why have we allowed this situation to arise?

The lioness mother made a mistake: she allowed her lion cub to fall out of her, and lost it. We have done the same: we have lost our children because of our foolishness, and our children have lost mother and father, although mother and father are still alive. But mother and father cannot love their children anymore, cannot embrace their children anymore, cannot sit down to eat a meal with them anymore, and the children cannot see the value of the parents. This is a huge tragedy, not only for us Vietnamese refugees in the West, but also for those who are already living in

mistakes that they have made in the past, and they practice in order to get their children back. We know that the lioness was very patient, and very loving, with a lot of love, although sometimes she had to say some things that she didn't want to say, things that were difficult for her to say, like: "Little one, I am so sorry, you are not a lion cub, you are a monkey, and I was very impolite." Can you see how much that lioness must have suffered when she said those words? But because she loved the lion cub so much, she said those words.

When we are a father or a mother who has lost our children, or is about to lose our children, we have to wake ourselves up, and see the risk that we are going to lose our children. If we lose our children, we lose everything: we lose our future, because our children are ourselves. And therefore we have to do everything, anything we can, in order to get back our children. With that love, with that intention, we can do anything. If we just say, "I am the father or mother, and that's my child. It's not my grandmother, to whom I have to show respect and politeness." If we say that kind of thing, then we are not doing as the lioness mother did. If we have lost our children, and we do not go through the difficult moments of having to apologize, then our children will not come back. Therefore we have to learn from this lioness mother, we have to know how to come to our children, accept our mistakes, and gradually bring our children back to ourselves. Then, the communication between the children and parents can be restored. Then we can begin to transmit to our children the beautiful and the good things, which belong to our native culture, to our spiritual culture, which comes from Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and which has been handed down to our people.

If we are Christian, we should see the same. If we hate our church, we hate our priest, we hate our minister, or if we are a Jew and we hate our rabbi, we hate our synagogue, that is because our church or our synagogue has made mistakes, has not understood us, has forced us to do things when we do not understand the reasons for doing them. When we use our authority to force people to do things they don't understand, they will hate us, they will hate our Christianity or our Judaism, and they will abandon these things in order to look for another path of practice. The ministers, the rabbis, the priests, the fathers and mothers, should see clearly the mistakes they have made, and learn the way of the lioness mother. They should say to their children: "In our cultural heritage, in our society, there are negative things, there are ugly things, there are misunderstandings, there is lack of freedom, but that is not everything."

If we make an effort, go back to our culture, our spiritual and cultural way of life, we will discover many, many precious jewels in our tradition, whether it is Western or Eastern, whether it's Jewish or Christian or Buddhist. Buddhism has its beautiful things—Buddhism also has ugly things. These ugly things are there because there are people who have not understood Buddhist, and therefore they have made things "Buddhist" which are not in fact Buddhist. There are superstitions; there is oppression, forcing people to do things that are in fact superstitions. Forcing people to do things is not true Buddhism, but it has been introduced into Buddhism. There are so many beautiful things in Buddhism, and so many beautiful things that we can find in Christianity, so many beautiful things in Judaism, which we can find. But the people, who have been responsible in these different religions, because they have not had their own peace and joy, have behaved in a way that forces other people, an oppressive way. And the people have not been able to bear it, so they have abandoned their religion. So the lioness mother must wake up, must be skillful, must say, "I have made mistakes. Please forgive me." We have to call our children our friends when we do this. We have to speak to our children as we would speak to a friend, and we have to accept that we have made mistakes.

Our ancestors have made mistakes too. They have been clumsy, they have not been able to understand the true transmission, they have not been able to understand the real virtues of our tradition, and they have done things, which are quite the opposite of the love and understanding, which are really there in the tradition. They have made use of religion in order to fight wars, in order to support violence, in order to support racial discrimination. These things are not the jewels of culture and religion, that is the garbage that has been made out of un-skillfulness, out of clumsiness. We have to recognize that these things are there, but they are not the only things. There are precious things, jewels, valuable things, so bright and shiny, things of happiness. If we go back together, we will be able to find these things, and we can hand them on for future generations to enjoy. Fathers and mothers have made mistakes, grandparents, ancestors have made mistakes, but that does not mean to say that this spiritual life has only ugly things—it has beautiful things, it has bright things, it has great things in it too. We have to know how to forgive, how to go back to our parents, so we can go together on a journey of discovery, to discover the beauty of our roots. I wonder how many people in the world are able to act as that mother lioness did?

This morning I had my breakfast with a novice monk. He is Vietnamese, and he grew up in the West. He was very successful in his studies in the West, he graduated as an architect, and he began to work as an architect. He was very happy in his work, but from the day that he met his lioness mother, he saw very clearly that his path was the path of coming home. He attended a retreat for Vietnamese people in the south of California. His English is perfect, he writes English very well, but his Vietnamese isn't so good, and he knew very little about Vietnamese culture and the Buddhism of Vietnam. But in one retreat he was able to return to the values of his spiritual and cultural tradition.

Then he wrote me a letter, and he said, "What is architecture for? Architecture is to create spaces where people can live at ease and in peace and joy. I think that becoming a monk is also practicing a kind of architecture, because we also produce spaces where people can live at ease, with freedom. In becoming a monk I am really carrying on the ideal of becoming an architect." It is a very wonderful letter. Then he asked, "Please may I become a monk, because I think that if I become a monk, I will be able to help many people. He has only been a monk since last winter, but he returned home very quickly, and he can speak Vietnamese very well, and he has learned a lot about Vietnamese culture. He went very quickly because in his heart there was deep aspiration and a great deal of love.

All lion clubs who have lost their way can do as he did, because the lioness mother is there. We can't say that she is not there. She is there with all her love. She has opened her heart in order to show the way to the lion cub when he comes home. All of us are lion cubs who have lost our mother, who have lost our race, who have lost our lineage. We have to listen to the call of our lioness mother, which is in our flesh, and go back to our roots. That is not only true for Vietnamese people who live in the West, but it is also true for Vietnamese people who are living in Vietnam, who find they have lost themselves. Vietnamese people who are here in the West feel that they are lost, because "This is not really my home, this is not really my society." And the Western society has made so many young people who also feel the same way: they do not feel at home even in their own society, and they feel they have lost their way. They don't have direction, they cannot recognize their ancestors, they cannot recognize their parents. Can there be any greater suffering than the suffering of a Vietnamese refugee who is wandering around without roots, or of a Western youngster who has no roots? This morning we sang the poem "Looking for Each Other," to remind us that we have to return to our roots, to our source.

In the past there were Catholic missionaries who came to Vietnam in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and their methods as missionaries were not very good. They encouraged Vietnamese people, "Please, do not worship your ancestors. Do not worship the Buddha. Throw all that away. Get rid of your altars; do not offer incense there anymore. You should only believe in Jesus Christ." They wanted us; they wanted to pull us up from our roots, because our roots are the reverence for the ancestors, and the reverence for the Buddha. Because of their very narrow way of looking at things, they wanted to cut us off from our roots. Therefore they formed a lot of people who didn't have roots.

When I came to the West, I did not come as a missionary. I came in order to call for an end to the Vietnamese war. Because I am a monk, wherever I go, I have to practice sitting meditation, walking meditation, and breathing. Young people in the West agreed with me, and wanted to work with me to bring an end to the war between the United States and Vietnam, and they learned how to breathe, they learned how to eat in mindfulness. While they participated in these things, they felt well, they felt light and happy, and they said, "Please, Thay, please teach us the way of practicing mindfulness. That is why I wrote books like "The Miracle of Mindfulness," to help my young friends to be able to practice mindfulness. When that book was first published, it was called "The Miracle of Being Awake," because I was afraid that the term "mindfulness" was a little too specialized. After that book had been published, Pax Christi in England liked the book very much, and they published it again, for people in their organization to be able to use. The people who did this were very intelligent, they were able to recognize the value of mindfulness practice in Buddhism for their own tradition, and their own congregation used this. I remember in California that there was an order of Catholic nuns who used this book for all the students of that order.

My friends encouraged me to lead retreats, where so many people have learned mindfulness, and I have never said, "Please give up your tradition to follow me." I say, "If you are Jewish, please do not abandon your Jewish roots. You can study Buddhism with me, but that will help you to go back to Judaism and discover the jewels in Judaism, that may have been covered up by layers, so that you haven't seen them. If you are Christian, please do not abandon your Christian roots, do not abandon your Christian ancestors." You are a lion, and you don't want to be a monkey. A lion can only be happy when it is a lion. Although it can learn the wonderful things that a monkey does, it cannot be really happy when it is cut off from its roots, when it is cut off from its lion lineage. A Catholic is the same. Even

roots, and you come from those roots. So I encourage you, come to the Buddhist monastery, learn how to practice mindfulness, and then you will see that in your own spiritual tradition there are jewels, and you will return to that tradition, and help re-establish those jewels in your tradition. Although there are negative things there, which have made the young people leave that church, try to find the jewels in your own tradition, so that the young people will have something to go back to, and there can be reconciliation between yourself and your ancestral tradition, and between yourself and your parents.

We have to reconcile not only with our spiritual traditions, but also with our blood traditions, and this is going back home. A tree, which has been cut off from its roots cannot be happy. If you dig up a tree, and you put it in a strange environment, even though you give it a lot of fertilizer, it cannot be happy. A person is the same: if you pull it up by its roots, and put it down somewhere else, it will not be happy. I am very aware of this, and that is why I have never encouraged anybody to give up his or her roots. I say, "You are Christian; do not give up your Christian roots. You are Jewish; do not give up your Jewish roots. This practice of mindfulness will help you to return to your roots, to transform the things that have gone wrong in your tradition, and allow the bright things to shine out again from your tradition." Therefore, I am determined to do that only, and I will never allow somebody to lose their roots, and I will always encourage people to go back to their roots. The story that the Buddha told about the lion cub was told for this very reason. We have been wandering for so many generations, and we must return home in order to re-establish the relationship with our parents, reconcile with our native land, and reconcile with our spiritual ancestors.

(Bell)

Last May, I was in the United States, in May and June. Once, we were going through a town, a small town, and I saw an advertisement. There were two parts to it, one before, and one after, with maybe a hundred meters between the two. It was in English. The first part of the advertisement said: "*Troubled? Why not try prayer?*" The second sentence said: "*The family that prays together, stays together.*" A church had placed these advertisements. Now, let us look and see whether there is any truth in this: that families that pray together every day will remain whole, and not be broken. The answer is, if we know how to pray together, we will not have breakage in our families. I think it's possible that this is true. But once a family has been broken, are we able to sit together and pray? Is the practice of prayer strong enough to prevent a family breaking? How do we pray in order for the family not to break? What is the content of our prayer? These are questions that we have to ask the minister of our church.

We know that prayer has an effect on our way of thinking and on our way of acting, but often, people pray a lot and there isn't really much result. Maybe because they just stick to the form, they say the name of the Buddha, they recite a great number of sutras, but their suffering doesn't seem to transform at all. The communication between them and others doesn't grow any better. In Taipei I heard about a woman who went to the temple and recited the sutras so much, but the situation did not get any better. Her husband was running after another woman, and she came to the temple in order to pray for her husband to leave the other woman and come back to her. She did this for several years, but it didn't have any effect. She came to me and asked why. I said, "You have to pray and recite the sutras and say the name of the Buddha so that every day you become more peaceful, you become more fresh, you become better at listening deeply, you become better at speaking lovingly, and that is correct prayer. But if you pray, and you are still very bitter, you are still very difficult, you are still very grumpy, what good will that do to help your husband come back home? Do something every day so that you can become more peaceful in your heart, you can become better at listening, and have the capacity to say sweet things. You can be loyal and not get angry quickly."

Reciting the sutras and praying are things that we need to do, but we have to do it in such a way that it really influences the way that our bodies and minds are. When we ask the question how should we pray, the answer is that we have to pray together. The question is not do we pray or do we not pray. The question is, do we know how to pray. When we practice mindfulness, we have to pray with our bodies, we don't only pray with our minds, because our bodies are very important. For example, we do walking meditation. Walking meditation is a form of prayer. Every step helps us to come back to the present moment, and gives us more solidity and more freedom. Every step like that, although we don't say any words, is a prayer, because it brings about a change in our person. When we sit on a cushion, and we let go of everything, and we breathe in and feel calm, breathe out and smile, that is also a kind of prayer. That prayer is done with our lungs, with our noses. We breathe in such a way that we are calm, and that calmness brings about a smile. That kind of prayer has an effect, because after twenty or thirty minutes we go out and we feel calmer, lighter, more patient.

We have to eat breakfast properly, and if someone looks at us, they will see us as if they were looking at someone who is praying. Every movement we make, the way we sit, in a very leisurely way, with time, we sit very solidly, like a lioness. Everyone sits; but if we know how to sit in a relaxed way, very solid, very free, then we look as if we are praying. As we are pouring the milk, we still have freedom and solidity—we stay in the present moment. And when we break the bread, it is as if the priest is breaking the bread in the Eucharist. We dwell in the moment, and we put the bread in our mouths, and we know that we are eating bread, and at that time we are really alive. The bread is real. We are real. We eat the bread in peace, in concentration, in solidity, and we are happy. That kind of breakfast doesn't just nourish our bodies it nourishes our minds. And if someone looks at us eating like that, it looks as if we are performing a ceremony.

This is not really a ceremony it is just eating breakfast. But when we have a drink of water, it is the same. We lift up our glass to drink, and if we do it with mindfulness, if we dwell in the present moment, drinking water is something very deep, very solid, and very free. And as we drink, we have the happiness of drinking water. Somebody looking at us will think we are celebrating a very solemn ceremony, but in fact we are only drinking water.

We are really there as we drink water, and we are really alive in the moment we drink water, and we are really alive in that moment, as we drink water. People who look at us think we are celebrating a solemn ceremony, but we are drinking water. We have to learn how to eat our breakfast so that when we are eating breakfast we don't run as though we are thieves, or as though thieves are after us. We have to eat in such a way that we are free people, that we are relaxed, that we are happy. Don't say that you don't know how to do it, I've taught you so many times. The thing is that you don't do it. Do you have half an hour? Can you use that half-hour to eat breakfast properly, deeply? You don't do it; you don't live in the environment of the Sangha. If you did, you would do it all the time. In Plum Village the permanent residents eat breakfast properly, and make breakfast into prayer. Eating breakfast mindfully makes people present in body and mind, and if you are here for seven days, don't use those seven days to worry and suffer; use those seven days to learn how to drink, how to eat, how to walk in mindfulness, and every moment of these seven days must be a moment of prayer.

When we are really praying, it will mean that we become freer, we become fresher every moment. Some children say: "Why are our parents so cruel at home, and when they come here they are so kind?" The children benefit from that change. When the parents are happy they help the children, and then the children in turn are much happier, and in turn they make the parents happier. This is a kind of prayer, but in fact we're not using words; we're not saying, "We respect father and mother." All we're doing is walking and sitting in mindfulness, and producing the energy of mindfulness to make ourselves healthier and happier. Because of that our relationships with others become better. So to make relationships in the home better, we have to live our daily lives in a certain way. We have to live according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

The Five Mindfulness Trainings are not to force us to do something; they are a way of living in mindfulness. Mindfulness is to live with awareness, to know that if I do that, it causes harm, and to know that if I don't do this, it causes happiness. The Five Mindfulness Trainings are to keep our bodies and minds healthy, and to keep our families healthy. This is the truth we have to accept: that if we live according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we will protect our bodies and minds, keeping them healthy, and protecting the relationships between ourselves and others, so that the relationships will not be broken. It is sure that the only way out for us is the practice of the Five Mindfulness Trainings. When we come to a practice center like this, we should know that if we receive the Five Mindfulness Trainings and bring them home and practice them, that is prayer which will protect us and protect the bodies and minds of those that we love. If we practice according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we can be sure that our families will never be broken, that is something that we can be completely certain about.

Today, Brother Sanghakaya will meet the Vice-President of America, and he asked me, "What should I talk to the Vice-President about?" and I said, "The Five Mindfulness Trainings." I said to talk about the Third Mindfulness Training, saying that with the Third Mindfulness Training you wouldn't have the difficulties that you've had in these past months. Because if President Clinton had kept the Mindfulness Trainings, he wouldn't have had these ups and downs, he wouldn't have had these difficult questions asked him by journalists, while he has so much work to do. For his family, for his nation, he has these terrible questions he has to answer. He needs the Mindfulness Trainings not only to protect himself, but also to protect his whole nation. His whole nation really needs the Five Mindfulness Trainings. If everyone in the American society, and in the French society, would live according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings, it is sure that the American people, and the French people, would not meet the disaster

that we are running to meet.

The Third Mindfulness Trainings says, "Move away from sexual misconduct. If two bodies unite, it can only happen when there is a long-term commitment." If you have had experience, you will know this. If there are not love and a long-term commitment, and there is the coming together of two bodies, this sexual activity will bring about suffering for both sides. We think that by sleeping together we will be less lonely, because we all have loneliness in us, and naively, we think that if we sleep with that person that we won't feel so lonely, but in fact the opposite is what happens. We've slept with each other so many times, and in fact we haven't felt any less lonely; in fact we have felt more angry and frustrated than we did before, because our bodies may unite, but there is absolutely no communication between our souls, there is no harmony between our souls. Therefore, to live according to the Third Mindfulness Training is to protect our bodies and our minds, to protect the body and the mind of the other.

Mindfulness trainings are for protection. We protect ourselves by practicing mindfulness, and we protect the bodies and minds of others. A second of mistaken behavior can bring about so much suffering in the future, and that is not only true for a president, but it is true for all of us. If we make mistakes, even just for a moment, the suffering for us, and for others in the future, could be very great. Therefore, we should practice the Third Mindfulness Training, in order to protect our own bodies and to protect the bodies and minds of others, and to protect the young people of our society. So many of them suffer for their whole lives because of sexual misconduct. If we are mother, father, uncle, or aunt, or grandparent, and we don't know how to keep the Mindfulness Trainings, and we make our children suffer because of that, then it is a terrible shame for our children. The Third Mindfulness Training is very necessary. If we do not keep the Third Mindfulness Training, our families will break. When our family is broken, what can we do? It is not enough to call on God once our family is broken. The only way to stop our family breaking is to practice the Third Mindfulness Training. That is the most effective way to keep our families together. Not only mother and father keep the Third Mindfulness Training, the children also keep the Third Mindfulness Training, and then the family will not be broken. Countless families have been broken because they have not practiced the Third Mindfulness Training. The Third Mindfulness Training is a prayer. It is a prayer we pray together. We don't pray with our minds, we pray with our bodies.

And the Fourth Mindfulness Training, what is it? The Fourth Mindfulness Training is to know how to listen deeply, to know how to use loving speech, words which express our love. The Fourth Mindfulness Training is just that. We never use words of swearing, or blaming, or condemning, and when someone speaks we have to listen. When somebody wants to say something we shouldn't shout and try to interrupt him or her. When we practice listening deeply, we can help the other a great deal. The other person has been suffering, and he or she hasn't been able to talk about this suffering. Nobody has ever bothered to sit down and listen deeply to him or her, and therefore his or her suffering has not been relieved. Now we sit with him, or with her, like the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, and we listen with all our compassion, so that he or she can speak about their suffering. Even though the other person says things that are due to wrong perceptions that we don't agree with, maybe what he or she says is bitter, or he or she is condemning us, still, because of our compassion, we are able to sit and listen. When he speaks, he suffers less. Then, a few days later, you will go to him and you will say, "You know, when you spoke the other day I saw how you were suffering. I understood you. But there were one or two things that I don't think you had understood, and that I would like to explain to you, so that you understand better what I was doing." By using this kind of loving speech, we help the other person get out of his wrong perceptions, and there will be change.

The Fourth Mindfulness Training is to make the gap between us disappear, the obstacles between us disappear, so that we can come together and re-establish communication. Therefore, the Fourth Mindfulness Training is a prayer, and we pray with our heart, we pray with our mouth. We don't need the name of Jesus Christ, we don't need the name of Buddha, we only need our ears to listen deeply, and our mouths to say loving things. After three days, five days, seven days, the situation will change. The person will see that we have become more kind. Before we were like a wall, whatever somebody said to us, it wouldn't go through. We were hard as a stone; now we have become gentle and soft, and we are able to listen to what the other says. And when we speak, it is very light and pleasant. That is the Fourth Mindfulness Training—it's not something we do because we want to do it, it's something we do because we have practiced to do it, because the Sangha has supported us in our practice. In Plum Village there are so many things we can learn with the Sangha in order to be able to practice the Fourth Mindfulness Training. When we practice this training in our family, we protect our family: our family will be whole and protected; it will not be broken. If everyone knows how to practice the Fourth Mindfulness Training, even if not completely, then we can be

The Fifth Mindfulness Training is about consumption. We have to be mindful when we consume. We have to know there are foods for our bodies, and for our souls, which are wholesome and healthy. When we eat them we will feel light, we will feel relieved, and we will be nourished in our bodies and our minds. But there are also things which, when we eat them, will destroy our bodies and our minds. There are books, there are newspapers, and there are television programs, which contain many poisons. We look at a newspaper, we look at a film, and so much violence, so much hatred, so much misunderstanding, so much fear, enters our bodies and our minds. When we stuff ourselves with this kind of thing every day, how can we avoid being sick? When we get angry, we just want to find an axe, or a knife, or a gun to shoot the other person. We don't know how to use loving speech. We don't know how to listen deeply, because we have ingested so much violence through the television programs. Every day we nourish ourselves with these kinds of poisons, violence, fear, and despair. Books, images, these things contain so many poisons, including craving and desire. Advertisements tell us, "You have to buy this to be happy." And if we buy this, we receive all the bad consequences.

Happiness does not come from consuming. Happiness comes from removing the suffering in us all, and then happiness will appear. This is something very wonderful. Many of us think that happiness comes from consuming something, from bringing something from outside into us, but in fact, happiness comes from inside. When we can remove the materials of anger, violence, hatred, and despair from our souls, then happiness will open like a lotus flower, or like a rose. The happiness of a flower does not come from outside, the happiness of a flower comes from inside the flower, and our happiness is the same. Because we have negative material in our bodies and minds, we are not happy. If we can take these things out of our bodies, if we can drink a lot of source water, and urinate, then our bodies will feel happiness.

It's not because we eat a lot that we feel happy, especially when we eat poisonous things that make our body heavier and heavier every day. Our souls are the same: it's not because we digest many films, many books, many magazines that we feel happy, it's because we are able to remove the poisons from our souls. That is what listening to a Dharma talk is for. Listening to a Dharma talk is to take the misunderstanding out of us, to take the ignorance out of us, to take the craving out of us, to take the anger and hatred out of us. The more we take out of us, the more our hearts will feel light and free, and happiness will be possible. Happiness grows from inside out. You must remember that. You do not need to look for happiness outside of you. Therefore, the Fifth Mindfulness Training is about consuming in mindfulness. Every day, what we eat, what we drink, what we consume in the way of books and relationships is very important, because when we consume like that we can bring so many toxins into our bodies.

There are children who sit in front of the television for three hours a day, and during those three hours, they stuff into their souls so much violence. When they go out into society they do just as they have seen on the television. When we don't like something, we want to eliminate it. We have a remote control, and when we don't like something we just eliminate what we don't like with that. When we can't get rid of somebody whom we hate, we shoot him or her to get rid of them quickly. But once we've done that, we have to be in the prison, so we don't really get rid of them as quickly as we thought. We have no patience, we have no love, we have no understanding, and these things are because of what we receive in our daily lives, through what we consume. And that is not really real life, it is more like real death, it is like suicide. .

We say that monks and nuns are not really alive, because they don't enjoy television and books; but in fact the monks and nuns are really alive. They don't consume toxins, they don't stuff themselves with these toxins, and therefore they are light in body and mind. We have television sets here, but television sets in the Upper and Lower Hamlets are used only to listen to Dharma talks, and all the television sets are practicing here, just like the monks and nuns. They never show scenes of craving, anger and violence. Here, consumption is in mindfulness. We never eat that kind of food, of violence.

If you are here for a year, you will be better in your mind, better in your body, because you have practiced the Fifth Mindfulness Training. Outside they talk badly about each other—this temple accuses the other temple, this person accuses the other person, but here we don't say unkind things about each other; we don't have the right to. We don't listen to each other saying unkind things about each other. If you stay here for seven days, fourteen days, you will feel better, and that is because you have practiced the Fifth Mindfulness Training, and the Fifth Mindfulness Training is a prayer. Every day we consume in mindfulness that is prayer. If we keep the Third, the Fourth, the Fifth Mindfulness Training, it is quite sure that our family will remain together.

Whenever I see someone kneel down and receive the Mindfulness Trainings, I feel happy. I feel happy for that person, I feel happy for that family, and I really want President Clinton, and President Chirac, and all the ministers to receive the Five Mindfulness Trainings. Buddhists can receive the Five Mindfulness Trainings from me; Christians can receive the Five Mindfulness Trainings from their priest or their minister, because the Five Mindfulness Trainings are available in Christianity too. They are very clear, the way that I have written them. Young people can read them. They are not prohibitions; they are not forcing you to do something. It is only because we have seen how much suffering there is that we are committed to keep the Five Mindfulness Trainings. Nobody forces us to keep the Five Mindfulness Trainings. It is only because we have woken up, we have seen that if we do not practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings our family will be broken, our society will be broken. That is why we have a deep aspiration to practice this way. And when at a retreat I see three hundred, four hundred, five hundred people kneel down to receive the Mindfulness Trainings, I feel so happy that I want to cry, because I know that the Mindfulness Trainings will help them to protect themselves, to protect their families, to protect their society.

Here we are living in a place where wine is made, but when there are four or five people who resolve not to drink a drop of wine for a day, I feel happy. Wine, alcohol, has brought about so many broken families. In the United States, in France, so many children have grown up suffering like hungry ghosts because the parents are alcoholic. The children go out and look for drugs to forget their suffering, and because of these drugs, the government has to use all sorts of violent means to put an end to drug trafficking. If we kept the Five Mindfulness Trainings, if everybody in our land lived according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we wouldn't need governments to use violent means to put an end to drug taking.

The Health Ministry in France gives advertisements from time to time, to help people drink less wine, because so many road accidents happen because of drinking wine. I remember once they had an advertisement that said, "One glass—okay; three glasses—hello to disaster." And I said, "How can the third glass be possible if we didn't have the first glass?" Therefore, my idea is to get rid of the first glass, because once there is the first glass, you may be thirsty for the second glass or the third glass. Once you have the second glass, you lose all your clarity and calm. The best way is not to have the first glass. If all the people who have vineyards around me heard me talking they would be very angry with me. I know they would suffer if people didn't drink wine, but when we hear the siren of the ambulance going quickly along the road to an accident...just a few days ago, four or five young people in Duras who were drunk drove their car into the lake and they all drowned, because they did not keep the Fifth Mindfulness Training.

The parents drink, and the therefore children drink—it's quite natural. How much should we drink? Very often he police have with them something you breathe into, and they know if you have been drinking and driving. There are so many wonderful things we can drink which are not alcoholic, so many juices. If we keep the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we are not only protecting our own bodies, our own minds: we are protecting our children and our parents. If as children we are to die, then the parents will feel as if they have died too, and if the parents die, the children will feel as if they have died too. So when we protect ourselves, we are protecting others. The Five Mindfulness Trainings are not an individual matter. The Five Mindfulness Trainings are a national matter. If the whole nation practices the Five Mindfulness Trainings the nation will be happy. There will not be broken families, broken society. Therefore, we know that the five Mindfulness Trainings are the most concrete way to practice mindfulness. If we receive the mindfulness trainings, and we encourage everyone in our family to practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings, that day will be the happiest day of our lives, for our family will remain together, and our family life of simplicity and beauty will influence other families in our society.

(Three Bells)

(End of Dharma Talk)

Dear Friends,

**These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.**

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# Taking Refuge

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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(Translated from Vietnamese into English by Sister True Emptiness)

Dear Sangha, today is the 4th of January and we are in the Winter Retreat. We are closing the chanting on Monday morning when we take refuge in ourselves, we are taking refuge in our own peace, and our happiness. When you read, "I take refuge in the Buddha in myself," you know right away that you are a happy person, because you know where you are going. You are going toward the energy of beauty, of goodness, of great understanding within yourself. So when you read "I take refuge in the Buddha in myself," you must be very happy, because you are confident that in you there is that wonderful energy of love, of peace, of great understanding. You may not yet be able to see them clearly but they are there. So when you read that, you must feel that "oh... I am that wonderful... I am that trust that I will be that Buddha... I will have that energy of peace, of love, of understanding. Of course in life things do not happen like we wish. So sometimes we feel a little bit irritated, angry. Sometimes we feel that we are restless and at the moment, right away, we should remember that within us there is the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. That source of love, of great understanding within you. So when you decide to return to that source, you will feel right the confidence in you. Like Thay, in the past, has explained that the road between Boston and New York... let's say if you decide – please forgive me if you live in New York – let's say if Boston is the positive side, New York is the negative side. If you just turn your back to the New York side, and then you turn your head to the Boston side right away can you see that you are on the way to Boston. That means that you are on the way towards the positive place. Even if you are still in New York, even if you are still in the negative place. You decide to turn your face to Boston, even though you are still in New York, but you are already on the positive side, you are on the way to reach the Buddha Nature within yourself. But if you are in Boston and you turn your face to New York, to the negative side, then even though you are in Boston, you are also in New York. So on the road New York – Boston every point contains New York and Boston. So on the road from an angry, agitated, jealous person, on the way to become a Buddha, every place where you are, right here and now, you are at the same time both Buddha and Mara. And if you turn towards Buddha, right away you are Buddha or on the way to become a Buddha. Even if you are in a wonderful place, you are a Dharma teacher, you are a great teacher, but if you turn in the direction of anger, irritation, jealousy, craving, then you are on the way to Mara. Every point of the road contains both. Every moment, where you are, you contain both. So, "I take refuge in the Buddha, the one who shows me the way in this life." The historical Buddha is just a spiritual teacher who leads you on the way, who shows you the way, who shows you his own experience. The word *dao su* means the master of the path. He is sharing his path with you. He is only the showing of the path, *dao* means path. The word *dao* here means not only the word path, but in the Chinese character written below is the sign of the hand. It means the path with the hand... you take the hand of somebody else to lead him on the way. The character below is *Su*. *Su* means the teacher. So the teacher of the path. So you are a student of the Buddha and you have to remember, the Buddha first of all is somebody who guides. He's not a god. He's not the creator. He's not the Lord/God. He's just your teacher. He just shares his own experience with you, to lead you on your own way. So when you start to read, "I take refuge in the Buddha," you must know that you turn to the direction of the Buddha within you, the wonderful source of love and peace and great understanding in you. Even if you are very angry at somebody, then you go back to your breath and you say, "I take refuge in the Buddha", that means "I take refuge in that wonderful source of love and peace." So right away in the very midst of irritation and anger, you are still on the way to become a Buddha... not a Buddha yet, but on the way. The word Buddha in Sanskrit... usually Indian people swallow the last syllable of this word... the Vietnamese pronounce "Bud-dha", the French also Bouddha. But in India, they always swallow this last syllable

pronounce "Bud-dha", the French also Bouddha. But in India, they always swallow this last syllable "Buddh...". So when it's transcribed into Thai, Vietnamese, we use the word "Buddh..." because the "a" is swallowed. They tried to explain that Buddhism... is the complement... it's like German, like Latin. The subject is Buddha but the complement is Buddhāṃ saraṇam. So Buddha saraṇam is I take refuge in the Buddha ... and Buddhāṃ ... because Buddha is no longer the subject but the complement. So when we recite "Buddhāṃ saraṇam gachāmi" - I take refuge in the Buddha. In English it's clearer because we say "I take refuge in the Buddha"... in the one who shows me the way in this life. I take refuge in the Dharma, the way of understanding and love. So Dharma here is defined as love and understanding. Maha Maitri Karuṇa means great compassionate love in Sanskrit is great understanding. So we can translate Dharma as great maitri karuṇa and Maha prajñā, so it means great compassion, love and great understanding. So Dharma is something very clear, very concrete, because if you say that the Dharma is the Tripitaka is too large, we may summarize the entire teaching into great understanding, great compassion and great love. "I take refuge in the Saṅgha." Saṅgha is the community that lives in awareness. There are so many communities, but there is only one community who tries to live in awareness and in great understanding and love. Saṅgha is that community... because there are millions of communities in the world. But which community will try to live in harmony with each other, try to live in peace with each other, with great love and great understanding? That is the Saṅgha. So these three refuges (the updated Plum Village version that we are presently studying) is more complete than the three refuges in Pali or Sanskrit, because we have expanded them in order to make them clearer. Sometimes, when our friends read the Refuges in Pali or Sanskrit, they see that they are so short and they read a second or a third time. They repeat it three times. In the Pali text we see nine sentences, because each refuge is repeated three times - three times taking refuge in the Buddha, three times taking refuge in the Dharma, three times in the Saṅgha. Even if it looks complicated... it's only repeated three times: I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dharma, I take refuge in the Saṅgha. Like when you sing a song Breathing in, breathing out but you feel that is not enough, it will not impregnate you enough. So you sing it for the second time... When you take refuge in the Buddha, you feel peace, you're confident; you have trust ... so you have the tendency to repeat it a second time, a third time. In our Vietnamese text or in the English text it seems more concrete, more complete. Because I take refuge in the Buddha, ... the one who shows me the way. I take refuge in the Dharma, the way of understanding and love. I take refuge in the Saṅgha, the community that lives in harmony and awareness. We also feel that we need to repeat it. So in the text in the new chanting book, we have put it three times also. When you recite it the first time, you see clearly the act that you are turning to that direction of Boston instead of New York. It means in that direction of great understanding and love instead of anger, irritation and jealousy. That is the first time. The second time you repeat the same thing, but you feel that you have already taken refuge. The first time, you turn to that direction only. The second time, you are really embodying. ... Your feet are already on that path. So having taken refuge in the Buddha I now have seen the way, I'm now on the way of great understanding and love. I'm on a wonderful way, full of light and full of beauty in this life. The first time, you turn to that direction, the second time, you repeat the same thing, but you feel that I already take refuge in the Buddha and so I am on the path of light and beauty. I look around and I see there are a lot of people who are in the same conditions as me, even in better conditions than me. They don't know it and so they are not on the wonderful path full of light and beauty like me. So I feel so happy. And the second time I have already taken the refuge in the Dharma. I am learning the way to transform my negative energy, my bad character, my bad habits in order to touch finally my peace and my harmony within myself and others. I see that I am already on that path, I am already on the way to transform my pain, my difficulties. "Phap Mon" (Thay has written 2 Chinese characters on the whiteboard), Phap means dharma and Mon means the door - the door of the Dharma. The Dharma has 84,000 doors and sometimes this door is adequate, appropriate to this person, another door is appropriate to another person. One door is sitting meditation. There are a lot of people who only like sitting meditation; they take the door of sitting meditation. You like the door of walking meditation. Others like the door of watering the flowers; other people need trimming the tree. This means that there are so many doors in the world. And you only choose the appropriate door for the appropriate person. It's up to you to choose the door that is appropriate to you. If you don't like to eat hot chili, nobody can force you to eat hot chili. If you don't like to eat tomatoes, nobody can force you to eat tomatoes. It's the same for the Dharma. If you don't like sitting meditation, nobody can force you to sit. I am taking refuge in the Dharma; I'm learning many doors that can help me to transform my negative habits. I will not only transform

negative habits. I will not only transform superficially my way, but I will transform at the base, at the root of my negative habits. So I really try to transform the alaya vijñāna - my store consciousness. I do not only try to transform myself superficially, but I try to transform at the level of my store consciousness. So now I take refuge in the Sangha. Having already taken refuge in the Sangha, I have the opportunity to be clear, to make my mind clear, thanks to the Sangha eyes. You have your personal eyes, but there are also collective eyes. The eyes of the Sangha are clearer than your eyes, your view. Your personal view is not deep enough. Everybody needs the Sangha eyes in order to shine on our personal narrow view. We do need the insight of others in order to help us to see things more clearly, using the Sangha eyes in order to help us to be deeper, to have a broader mind. I am living with the Sangha, I am profiting from the Sangha eyes in order to be deeper, in order to have a wider view. Living with the Sangha has that advantage. You need to frequently request the Sangha eyes to shine on your behavior so that you can see yourself clearer. We always try to see ourselves clearer, but we can never see enough. We do need the Sangha eyes in order to broaden our views, to deepen our views. If you have the Sangha beside you, on the left, on the right, you will not fall into negative energy that you regret later on. So the teaching of the Buddha is that you must stick to your Sangha in order for you to be more and more deep, more and more wise. When you decide to take refuge in the Sangha, you have a support. But when one day you decide to leave the Sangha, you must be aware that you are on a dangerous path. Like the tiger that decides to live in the jungle in order to go to the city... the tiger must be very alert. If not, the tiger will be killed. If we leave the Sangha we have to double our mindfulness, our awareness, so that you will not be thrown by the negative energies surrounding you. When you take refuge in the Sangha, you can feel the trust that living with the Sangha, you agree to listen to the Sangha eyes in order to transform yourself. Having already taken refuge in the Buddha, I am already on that wonderful path of light and beauty. Having already taken refuge in the Dharma, I am transforming all my negative energies. Having taken refuge in the Sangha, I have the whole Sangha who supports me, who shines awareness on me, helps to clear my mind and helps me to see more deeply. Now for the third recitation... as we recite them three times. The first time you turn towards the direction of beauty. The second time: you see that you have that light; you are on the path of light and peace. Now the third time. When you recite for the third time, you say, "I take refuge in the Buddha in myself and I vow that everybody sees their own Buddha Nature and see that they have their own ability to be like a Buddha, their own ability to become that source of love and peace and understanding. For the third time, having taken refuge in the Buddha already ... and having trusted the Buddha Nature in you already, I vow, I wish that everybody will realize that they also have that source of great understanding and love, they also have that Buddha in them. When I take refuge in the Buddha in me, I know that in me there is that wonderful light of peace, of understanding. I have a mind of love - the bodhicitta. As I have a lot of bodhicitta, I wish that everybody will realize that they also have that Buddha Nature, that nature of enlightenment, that everybody will see that they themselves are also light, the light of understanding and love. The nature of nature of enlightenment exists in everyone. But rare are the people who know that. The day when the Buddha realized for the first time that he had totally broken through all his confusion, and had become a Buddha, his first sentence was: "How strange, every living being has that Buddha Nature, has that nature of enlightenment, but they don't know and they continue to keep drowning in the ocean of suffering." That was the Buddha's first sentence. So the third time, we recite, "I take refuge in the Dharma within myself". Usually you think that you learn the Dharma with a spiritual teacher. But in fact, the Buddha said, that the method exists already in you. In order to touch that source of peace, you have your own methods. You take refuge in the Dharma in yourself. This means you touch your own experience, because the Buddha shows you his experience and you have to discover your own experience. When you discover your own experience... I wish that everybody will also discover their own wonderful experience to transform their negative energy in order to become a Buddha. You have to discover your own experience to practice in order to touch your own Buddha. You wish that everybody can get a chance to touch their own experience of transformation in order to help themselves to become Buddha as soon as they can. When you discover your own experience it doesn't mean that you will not have attachments. Since you have attachments you say that every time I have an attachment, I have to practice like that in order to detach. You know that sometimes you are attracted by craving. When you find your own experience you say that every time I am stuck by craving, that is what I should do in order to discharge the craving in me. And if I am angry, then, in the past I have practiced and I have seen that every time I am angry or I'm on the way to get angry, that's the way I practice in order to be detached from my anger. So that is your own experience and you wish that

the way I practice in order to be detached from my anger. So that is your own experience and you wish that everybody will discover their own experience in order to master themselves and to reach their Buddha Nature. I take refuge in the Sangha in me already; I vow that everybody can be a part of the four Sanghas like me. When you practice with the Sangha, you have the four Sanghas, because according to the tradition, around the Buddha there are always the four Sanghas: the Sangha of monks, the Sangha of nuns, the Sangha of laymen, the Sangha of laywomen. I live with the four Sanghas and I vow that in the future, everywhere people can also set up their own four Sanghas in order to protect them and help them on the way to becoming enlightened. When I take refuge in the Sangha in me, I wish that everybody has the ability to be a part of the four Sanghas in order to master all the four Sanghas ...Nghiep (in Vietnamese) means to embrace, master, make one, one body... in order to be able to make four Sanghas into one body. There is no leak, no war in these four Sanghas. There is the atmosphere of peace, of harmony in these four Sanghas. I wish that everybody can be or to do like that.

[bell]

From now on, every time you read, "I take refuge in the Buddha, in the Dharma, in the Sangha," you have to read with a clear voice and you have to read with all your being. So that when you read the first time, you see that you are turning to the direction of beauty and goodness, to the Buddha in yourself. When you recite the second time you see that, having beauty and peace already, you wish that everybody can see like you, that means like the way we just explained. So you live three periods like I just explained about how I take refuge in the Buddha. When you read like that, verbally, loudly not only does it radiate for you, but it radiates for those who listen to you. There are those visible beings and there are invisible beings too, who can listen to you, to your voice. When you chant like that you should feel that the whole universe is listening to you, including yourself. This is the chanting of Monday evening. We will recite the ten vows of Samantabhadra. The ten aspirations of Samantabhadra. (Thay reads in Vietnamese, the Opening verse for this section of chanting "Homage to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the Avatamsaka Realm"). Avatamsaka means flower adornment, or flower garlands. These garlands of flowers are so precious that you cannot buy them in the market. In the dictionary they put the word wreath. Before the word Avatamsaka appeared, there was already another name for that sutra, called Yen.

Avatamsaka Sutra, the sutra, which adorns with garlands of flowers, is a very great sutra. This sutra appeared in the first century after Jesus Christ. Avatamsaka Sutra is a sutra of Mahayana Buddhism. You will not find it in the Pali Canon, because it appeared in the first century after J.C., written by a number of great patriarchs, great enlightened teachers. Gandhariyuha means adornment with perfume, more than flowers. In the beginning the name of this Sutra was adornment with perfume. In our Sangha there is one sister who has the name adornment with perfume and another is adornment with flowers like Huong Nghiem (Frafrant Adornment) and Hoa Hghiem (Flower Adornment). In the fifth century that sutra had been translated into Chinese. This sutra has been realized step by step, not right away like Lotus Sutra. In the beginning a number of patriarchs wrote a number of chapters and later on some enlightened teacher felt that it was not enough. So he added more in order to make it complete. The two first chapters in the primitive sutra were "Ten Stages" and "Entry into the stream of Reality"...in the past it was only two chapters. Now these two chapters are only two chapters among a lot of chapters of the Avatamsaka Sutra. But they are the most basic chapters. The Avatamsaka Sutra has been developed slowly. The version that we have today is totally complete, and has developed the concept of inter-being, inter-penetration and inter-connection to the highest and most profound level. It has become a jewel of humanity, not only a jewel of Buddhism. Because there are even those who don't know anything about Buddha, after reading that sutra have to agree that it is a real jewel of humanity. In that sutra you see inter-being nature, for example, in the flower you see the sunshine, you see the rain, you see the farmer, you see the earth, you see the minerals, you see the love, the care of the farmer etc. In that sutra you also see that the whole universe is a great flower and in that great flower there is a multitude of elements. And you see that the whole universe is condensed in one grain of dust and in one grain of dust you can see the whole universe. In the grain of dust you can see everything, million and million of elements of the cosmos. These are the two sentences we should remember: "One is everything and everything is one" and "The whole cosmos can be contained in a single grain of dust". Everyone is one or everyone could be condensed in one. The most famous personality in that sutra is Samantabhadra, like Manjusri Bodhisattva in the Prajñāpāramitā Sutra. There are three main elements of the Avatamsaka Sutra. The

single grain of dust". Everyone is one or everyone could be condensed in one. The most famous personality in that sutra is Samantabhadra, like Manjusri Bodhisattva in the Prajñāpāramitā Sutra. There are three main elements of the Avatamsaka Sutra. The first one is the prajña view, it means the view of great understanding... and then Great Action and Great Vow... it means a great insight. Insight, action and the eyes of wisdom... in many books you can see that it is translated by "the eyes of wisdom," the view of great understanding. ... Hanh in Vietnamese is action and the vow... you vow to act like that, to do like that. Samantabhadra is the one who is great, who embodies these three main elements, the insight, the great action and the deep vow. The essence of the Avatamsaka Sutra is not only insight but also a vow, an aspiration, a great determination. Avatamsaka Sutra is also action, not only wishful thinking but the will to embody deep action, action accompanied by great understanding, not a blind action. We know that with that insight, with the insight of Avatamsaka Sutra, we can look into the world full of misery, of confusion, of discrimination, of anger, of racism, of suffering and we can see another world, the world where there is communication, there is no discrimination, where there is a lot of light and love. And it's strange that these two worlds are one. They are not separate. Look deep into the world of misery, of discrimination, of racism, of suffering and you can see the world of light, of great understanding, of love. The word Loka means the world. In Buddhism you can hear very often Loka and Lokadhatu, it means the world of suffering, the world of restlessness, the discriminating world. But then you hear another word, Dharmadhatu that is the world where there is a lot of light, of flowers, of love, of understanding. But these two worlds are one. Some teachers used to think that when you practice very well, the day you will die, you will be reborn in the Dharmadhatu. That's not the way the Buddha taught it. The Buddha said that in this very world, Lokadhatu, you can touch the Dharmadhatu. In this very world, in this very moment, when you are full of anger, sadness, discrimination, you can look deeper and you can transform right away this very moment into the world of great understanding, love. People who see in a very superficial way can think that light is outside of the flower, the rain is outside of the flower, the farmer is outside of the flower. But if you look deeper you see that in the flower there is sunshine, there is rain, there is the farmer, there is love, there is care. If you can see like that, it is insight. Not only you see in the flower, the sunshine, the rain, the farmer, but you see also in the rain the sunshine, in the rain you see also the flower. This means that everything is interconnected deeply and vice versa...it is reciprocal. In the Lokadhatu you are different from the person that you love and you feel less good than the person you admire, better than the person you hate. But in the Dharmadhatu you see that you and the person you love are one and the person that you don't love are one too. The difference is whether you know how to use your insight, your wisdom eyes, or not. If you use your wisdom eyes then you see that the person you love is also you, the person you hate is also you. Then you will see that the weakness of the other person is also your weakness. Like when the right hand sees the weakness in the left hand, the right hand does not blame the left hand for its weakness. Wisdom eyes help us to see like that and then we go right away from Lokadhatu to Dharmadhatu. Sudhana is the young man who has received the order from Manjushri, his teacher, who said "You can go and study with every teacher among the 52 teachers." He did not say... "You are my student, you only learn with me." He allowed Sudhana to go and study with everybody, every teacher, including children and non-Buddhist teacher. Among the 52 teachers, people said that there was also the Lady Mahamaya, the mother of the Buddha. You have to touch earth deeply in order to touch Mahamaya, the mother of the Buddha Gautama. You must try to go and search for Mahamaya, which is the mother of the Buddha and then she can teach you a lot. Sudhana tried to go around and around search a lot but he couldn't find her. One-day people told him that he only had to touch her deeply in order to see her, not to go around. One day when he touched the earth deeply, suddenly he saw, springing from the earth, a great lotus with one thousand petals. And he saw himself sitting on one petal. But then he saw that the petal suddenly became another lotus with one thousand leaves. In each leaf he saw himself sit there. In that leaf petal, not in the petal of the flower, and he looked deeper and he saw that in that second step where he is in the petal of lotus, he sees himself again as a big lotus with one thousand petals... and so on. He looked more deeply and he saw Mahamaya sitting on another petal. He stayed in another petal of lotus, looking at him and smiled... And he himself is sitting on a lotus petal and this petal is transformed in a big lotus with one thousand petals. In each petal he is there and Mahamaya is also sitting there. This means countless ways to see from one countless things, petals. He is not less surprised when suddenly Mahamaya said "Young man, do you know, one day, when I was pregnant with my son Siddhartha, what do you think, I felt so happy and so light, full of happiness. You know that when Siddhartha Buddha just entered in my womb, I felt so peaceful. You



entered in my womb, I felt so peaceful. You know when in your womb there is a young Buddha, you'll be very happy, you'll be very light." And then Mahamaya said, "When my son Gautama Buddha just entered in my womb and I felt so happy and at that time there were countless bodhisattvas in ten thousand worlds coming and wishing to pay respect to my son. I had no time to think. I didn't know how I could fit them all inside me but all the bodhisattvas came in and visited him. I didn't have time to think and then all of them entered in my womb and there was still plenty of space. I didn't know that in my womb there was so much great space. Countless bodhisattvas were entering in my womb and my womb still had a lot of space to house all of them. Suddenly I felt that if countless other bodhisattvas wanted to enter in my womb, my womb still had space for all of them." It means that the infinitely small can contain the infinitely great. One Vietnamese Buddhist Zen monk said that you can condense the whole universe and you can put it on the top of one hair. He said that the moon, the sun, the whole universe can be condensed and be put on the top of a hair. The ideas of small and big are only in the historical dimension, in the very superficial way to think and to see. If you look deeper you will see that the whole universe is contained in one. The way to describe that in the lotus with one thousand petals, there is one young man sitting there... and the young man will become the lotus with one thousand petals and so on. Then the lady said, "Do you know, I am the mother of all the Buddhas. I am not only the mother of the Buddha Gautama, but I am the mother of all the Buddhas now and I am the mother of all the Buddhas in the past and the mother of all the Buddha in the future. Then you know that you are also like me. You are also pregnant of one Buddha. Even though you are a boy. You still can be pregnant of a Buddha. And you are the father or the mother of all the Buddhas in the past, all the Buddhas in the present, all the Buddhas in the future. You have to take care of the Buddha in you. Don't have any guilt that you are dirty, because dirty is also a thought of discrimination... dirty/immaculate, high/low, good/bad because you are as great as Mahamaya. You are also the mother of all the Buddhas in the past, the present and the future. Because the infinitely small can contain the infinitely great.

[bell]

The sutra of ten aspirations of Samantabhadra is from the chapter thirty-six of Avatamsaka Sutra. The Ten aspirations and also ten actions of Samantabhadra. Body, spirit and mind in perfect oneness... I vow to purify my body, my spirit and my mind and touch deeply countless Buddhas. [...] I try to purify my body, my spirit and my mind in order to touch countless Buddhas in all worlds in the ten directions. In order to touch these Buddhas I purify my body, to purify my spirit, to purify my mind. The word here is "I purify my body, I purify my spirit, I purify my mind in order to touch countless Buddhas. Body, spirit and mind are purified. These three are one. The three are purified. I touch deeply countless Buddhas. Hang Xa means the sand of the Ganges river... it means the number of Buddhas as numerous as the number of sand of the Ganges. In all the world, in the ten directions and in empty space, the third sentence is for expressing all the Buddhas in space. The fourth sentence is the past, the present and the future; this means the Buddha in time. Tap Phuong (ten directions) it means in space. Tam The means past, present, future ... space and time... ten directions. The ten directions are: east, west, south, north, north-west, north-east, south-west, south-east, up and down. When you join your palms, you have to look deeply and see that all the Buddhas, countless Buddhas, as numerous as the number of sand grains of the Ganges River, in space and in time... And when you see like that, everywhere like that, then you may touch the earth. Don't touch the earth before you visualize that you are touching all these Buddhas in space and in time. Don't look in a very superficial way with your fresh view but with your insight view. When you touch one, you touch one time, but you touch countless Buddhas in space and in time. Space means the ten directions. The teaching of the Buddha is like the roaring of the lion. One of the names of the Buddha is "lion among men". I use my body, my mind and my spirit in order to touch all the Buddhas of the past, the present and the future. We are also a Buddha in the future and you see the Buddha but you are touching yourself. You are touching yourself is not because you are also a future Buddha. When you hear the bell, don't touch the earth like a piece of meat. Touching the earth, you have to touch earth deeply, body, spirit and a great insight, to see that you touch millions of Buddhas in different directions and throw your piece of meat on the earth... flesh on the earth. The spiritual power of Samantabhadra enables me to be present everywhere; even if I stay here, I stand here. But thanks to the spiritual power of Samantabhadra, I will see myself everywhere in the world. In my superficial way to see things, in my confused way to see things, I think that I am only that unique person staying here. But with your deep spiritual power, thanks to the help of your deep insight, I can also see that I am

things, I think that I am only that unique person staying here. But with your deep spiritual power, thanks to the help of your deep insight, I can also see that I am everywhere. I see myself in the thousands of generations of my ancestors already passed away. I see myself in thousands of generations of my descendants who have not appeared yet. But I see myself in all of them, in many thousand generations after now. I see myself in countless forms, in the trees and in the animals, in the rocks ... everywhere. Thanks to the insight look of Samantabhadra I learn to have that insight look and I see that I am everywhere. I can see that I am everywhere. I am in my parents, in my great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents, in many thousand generations of my parents of blood family, of spiritual family, of land family. I see myself in my children and the descendants of my children, many thousand generations of my descendants, everywhere. Then I see myself in every living being. I don't know if you have experienced that some time ... I look at the past and I see a number of bubbles and look deep in each bubble, there is my visage reflected then so if there are three hundred bubbles in the river, I see three hundred faces of myself in that. So we have to see ourselves like that. We see ourselves in every leaf, every tree, every flower, every rock, every piece of dirt, everything, everywhere. And we see ourselves in all our ancestors, in all our descendants. The one who bows and the one who is bowed to are of the same nature of emptiness. They are one. The one who bows and the one who is bowed, they are of the same nature of emptiness and so they are one. Like the flower and the light. The light is flower, the flower is light. When you look deeply into the flower, you see the light. When you look deeply into light, you see the flower. When you look deeply into a mother, you see a child. When you look deeply into the child, you see the mother. You cannot remove the mother out of the child, the child out of the mother. When you look deep like that into your anger against you mother, it will disappear. If you removed the one who bows, how could there be anything to be bowed to? You cannot separate them. The one who bows and the one who is bowed to are one. They are one because they have the same nature of emptiness. Empty men empty of a separate self. You cannot exist by yourself alone, you have to exist together with sunshine, rain, human beings, etc. You co-exist, empty of a separate existence. When you make body, speech and mind in oneness, in purity, you may touch the earth, then you will see that you are everywhere, you are touching the Buddha. This means you in the tree are touching the Buddha, you in the flower are touching the Buddha. You are in the excrement and you are touching the Buddha. You are in the ... (?), are touching the Buddha. You are your brother who is touching the Buddha. When I was sixteen years old, in the Buddhist temple, I learned like that and I chanted a lot, but I didn't understand quite well until lately. when I entered in the monastery I perfectly but I didn't understand like that. I read like a parrot, but I didn't understand anything. I touched the earth, I stood there like I was in Indra's Net. This is the net that is made with millions of jewels, or gems. So the place where I was standing, was like a net of millions of gems, they call it Indra's Net. My body is reflecting countless Buddhas. So when I am touching the earth there are millions of me who are touching the earth, touching millions of Buddhas, millions of me touching millions of Buddhas. In front of every Buddha there is me who is touching the earth, paying respect to that Buddha. The spiritual power of Samantabhadra just as it is impossible to count the number of Buddhas, in the same way, it is also impossible to count how many me's are bowing to these Buddhas. I have, therefore, no guilt, and no feeling of inferiority. I am equal like the Buddha. However many Buddhas there are, there is also the same number of myself.

Thanks to the spiritual power of Samantabhadra I can be everywhere. Wherever there is a Buddha, there is me, who touches the Buddha Nature of that Buddha. How many grains of dust are there in France, in Great Britain, in Germany or in every country throughout the world? They are countless. Because the number of Buddhas are as numerous as all the dust of all the world, France, Italy, Germany, etc. Everywhere, how many grains of dust like that, how many me? How many Buddhas like that? How many countless me touching countless Buddhas? Now I am one body touching one Buddha. But then I see myself in countless bodies touching countless Buddhas. In the Vietnamese text it's easy. Wherever there is a Buddha, there is me. In a grain of dust there are countless Buddhas. When we say a grain of dust, it means the infinitely small atom. Now there are people who use the word atom or elementary particle. In an elementary particle there are countless Buddhas. Each of these Buddhas has his/her own Sangha. When we look into a grain of dust, we see countless Buddhas and each Buddha has his or her own Sangha, his/her own four Sanghas. In each pore of your hair you can also see ten thousand Buddha Worlds. In each Buddha World there are also four Sanghas. In the Avatamsaka Sutra it is explained this way. In every small grain of dust you can see countless Buddhas and each Buddha has his/her own world with all four Sanghas. My faith is very strong, it is very complete, it is very total. I believe strongly



and each Buddha has his/her own world with all four Sanghas. My faith is very strong, it is very complete, it is very total. I believe strongly that I am here and I am also everywhere. I am in the infinitely small as well as in the infinitely great. This also helps to explain the character of interpenetration. When you see one in everything, there in a small thing [you see] the infinitely great and in the infinitely great [you see] one, you are entering into the Dharmadhatu, the world of light and beauty instead of suffering and misery. Every Buddha is sitting with stability in his/her own world with his own four Sanghas. My belief, my strong belief, my total belief in the presence of these Buddhas is very firm.

Now we go to the next paragraph, which speaks about praising the Buddha. You must think to yourself: "I am the ocean of sound in order to radiate, to radiate all the wonderful sounds in order to praise the merit of the Buddhas, in the past, present and countless lives in the future. Thay is reading a number of his poems also praising the Buddha - *the Buddha is like the full moon, shining a lot of light, shining a lot of compassion, etc.* He evokes the number of his poems praising the Buddha and there is also one paragraph praising the Buddha in the Avatamsaka Sutra. We can ask ourselves, "Does Buddha need us to praise him?" He does not have a self. Why does he need us to praise him a lot? He didn't want to be praised. But our tendency is to touch the earth and praise the Buddha. When we praise the Buddha with all his qualities, we are going in that direction, because we know that we also have that Buddha Nature. Every quality that we give to the Buddha, we see that we have that quality too. It doesn't mean that the Buddha wants to be praised. He doesn't care. But we do need to praise him in order to remind ourselves that we also have these qualities. In that paragraph it's said that I use all the oceans of sound in order to praise, to radiate in a very wonderful way in order to praise the merits of a Buddha. A Buddha's store of merits are full in the past, the present and the future. In order to express something very deep, very profound, we use the image of an ocean or sea. Because you praise the Buddha so much, you have to use a simile like an ocean of sound in order to praise the Buddha. We need an ocean of sound in order to praise the Buddha enough. Our happiness is so great. We also use the image of the ocean in order to express the great depth of our happiness or the great depth of our admiration. I am using the ocean of sound to praise the Buddha with all his merits. I would like not only to praise him now, but also to continue to praise him for countless lives in the future. So now is not enough time for me to praise you. I want to continue to praise you for many countless lives in the future. That is the meaning of the four sentences. That is about that paragraph, the fourth paragraph of the Ten Vows of Samantabhadra. I am using the ocean of sound in order to express countless wonderful words in order to praise the ocean of merit of the Buddha, not only now, but for countless lives in the future. The very deep ocean of merit of the Buddha. It's simpler to follow the Vietnamese text, it's clearer. I take the most wonderful garland of flowers with a lot of fragrance, a lot of perfume, a lot of music, a lot of parasols in order to offer to the Buddha. This paragraph is about offering. I decide to go and offer to all the Buddhas the most wonderful garlands of flowers, the best perfume, the best music and the best parasols in a very beautiful way. ... Garlands of the most wonderful flowers, fragrance, incense, music and parasols. Of course, when we offer to the Buddha we will not offer the kind of sad music that makes you feel that all your intestines are cut into small pieces. We have to offer to the Buddha the most light, the most wonderful music.

[Bell]

In the infinitely small, is contained the infinitely great. So even one infinitely small idea of goodness in you can move the infinitely great world [end of tape 1]

... infinite anger in you can also disturb the infinitely big world. So we have to be very aware of that.)

I take the first class garlands of flowers, the most wonderful garland of flowers, the fragrance, the best incense, the best music, the best parasols to offer to the Buddha, to the Tathāgata. Food, robes and fragrant flowers, torches and mats on which to sit. They are all here in plenty as we offer to the Tathāgata. Clothes, food... Every kind of cloth, every kind of flower, every kind of incense, every kind of torch or seat we will offer. It is the way we offer in our insight in which we use our insight when we offer something that determines the value of that act of offering. It's not because you give a lot of offerings that you have more merit. It is your way of offering that obtains a lot of merit. In the past there was one very poor beggar, an old woman. She only had a small amount of oil to offer to the Buddha. But the lamp of that woman continued to shine the whole night, while the prince and princess offered a lot of money for

Buddha. But the lamp of that woman continued to shine the whole night, while the prince and princess offered a lot of money for the oil in order to honor the Buddha, but all the lamps went out very soon. Only the one cent oil of that beggar women lasted very long. Because she had offered that with all her being. So that offering was so great that the oil lasted. Nobody could extinguish that lamp, until one day when Shariputra had to use magic power to extinguish it. This means that when you offer something with all your being, it's not the quantity that counts, it's your whole being. Clothes, flowers, incense, torch and seats ... I offer with my whole being, with my deep insight to all Buddhas. In the Chinese text it is said that the number of things I offer to you are so numerous that, if piled up they would form a very high mountain... plenty of clothing, plenty of flowers, plenty of incense, plenty of torches, plenty of seed I want to offer to you. And we offer our deep trust to the Buddha, our deep confidence to the Buddha. The next paragraph is: "I use my large and deep insight in order to offer to you, the Tathágata." Tanh Gai means my insight and my solid belief and my great trust in you and in the Buddha in the ten directions and in the past, the present and the future... to offer to you. If I can offer my insight and deep confidence in this way, it is more important than food, clothing and other things. That paragraph is: "I use my deep insight, my strong belief, my strong trust in the Buddhas in the three times, i.e. the past, the present, the future." It's thanks to the spiritual of the S\* that I can offer to all the Buddhas my deep insight as well as my strong belief in the Buddha. So I and Samantabhadra are one. It's thanks to that spiritual power of Samantabhadra in me that I can offer my deep insight, my strong belief in the Buddhas in the three times, past, present and future. Now the next paragraph (it's about beginning anew) : "In the past I have created a lot of negative habits and negative Karma." From my previous lives I have created a lot of negative Karma, because of my craving, because of my anger, because of my confusion and my ignorance. Since time immemorial ... from the beginning-less time I have had a lot of anger, a lot of craving, a lot of confusion. From the no-beginning, from immemorial time I have been craving, I have been angry, I have been ignorant... and I have created a lot of negative Karma by my words, by my body and by my thoughts. May I decide to begin anew. Now I decide to stop all these things in order to begin anew. Since immemorial time, from my body, from my speech, from my mind I have created a lot of negative Karma, because of craving, because of anger, because of ignorance. Today I decide to stop them all and to begin anew. Now we arrive at the next paragraph. ...to rejoice together with others. When you have done something good, you are joyful. But when we practice this, if somebody is successful, we feel that it is our success, we are joyful together with him. If you fail an exam that your sister succeeds, you train yourself to be joyful with her success. You don't discriminate... "oh, she's successful, I am not, I am so mad". No discrimination. You are joyful with her. If somebody has done wonderful work, you are so joyful for him and for you too. Because you feel that you and him/her are one. I see that you are treasured by Thay, so I behave in a very helpful way because I am very joyful for you, I'm not jealous of you. You are respected by people, I am joyful with you, for being respected by people. I will not be jealous of you. This means you are joyful with the joy of others, you are not jealous, you will not say: "What you are joyful is mean." I don't feel any jealousy. Rejoicing together with others is a very good medicine against jealousy. You are joyful with the joy of others. You are joyful with the success of others. If you receive the lamp transmission from Thay, I'm so happy because Thay gave the lamp to you, I feel that it is as if he gave the lamp to me. I'm not jealous. I am joyful with the joy of all the merits; people have done in ten thousand directions. In ten thousand directions there are countless people who practice merit. Every merit done by others, I feel that it's my merit. I feel so joyful, so happy. If you are jealous of that person, because every day there are countless others who achieve a lot of merits and if you start to be jealous of this one and this one and that it will be endless jealousy. So that is medicine against jealousy. I see countless living beings in ten thousand directions, who have done a lot of merit, I feel joyful, I feel happy as if I was doing that work. Those who are Vo hop means you don't need study more. You are already achieved you don't need to learn. You are already achieved people. In our case, we need to learn more, we need to train ourselves more. But in this sutra Vo hop means these people don't need to learn anything. They are already achieved people. ... two opposite significations. There are those who ... need to be trained and there are those who don't need to be trained. They are already achieved people. They are... all the Tathágata, all the bodhisattvas. All the world's living beings in the ten thousand directions, people who need to be trained and those who are already achieved. ... Sravaka means, those who need the teaching in order to be enlightened. Those who need to listen in order to be enlightened, who need to be trained by listening. They need to learn directly from the teaching of the Buddha. Those who need to listen directly to the teaching of the Buddha. Pratyeka Buddhas are those who become Buddha by

those who become Buddha by themselves. They don't need to be trained by anyone. They look deeply and they see the interconnection, interpenetration of all things. And they develop their own insight. All the Tathāgatas and all the bodhisattvas, if they do any merit, I feel that it's my merit. I feel joyful, exactly like as if I had done that. Any merit they can obtain, I will be very happy for them, exactly as if I had this merit. You only need to practice that and then you will be happy already. If your brother in the Dharma is loved by Thay, you feel that you are loved by Thay. You don't need to be jealous with him. If your sister has done a great work, you are so joyful with her success; you don't need to be jealous. Now the sixth action. The fifth is to be joyful with the merits of others, no jealousy. Now we arrive to the sixth action of Samantabhadra: Invite people to practice. When the Buddha first was enlightened, he hesitated. He said, "What I just discovered is so wonderful. But I am wondering if people can understand me. Maybe it's a waste of time if I explain they will not trust me, they won't believe. So maybe it's not good for me to share. I just enjoy my peace and my harmony. That's enough." But finally he decided to go. When you hear that there is a place where great people are, doing wonderful work, we have to invite others to join and to do that wonderful work also. The lamp of the world, it means those who are very wise.... wise personalities, we call them the lamp of the world. If the world is full of confusion, if you can see one lamp of the world, you have to come and beg these people come and save the world. In the ten directions, wherever I see a lamp of the world, i.e. wherever I see a wise man, or a number of those who have just been enlightened, even if they are newly enlightened, I will also come to them and beg them to teach, to go out and teach people. The one who is already enlightened, the one who's just enlightened, whenever I see them, I have to come and beg them to go out and share their own experiences, turn the wheel of the Dharma, i.e. invite them to share the Dharma with others, share their own experience of wisdom with the world. Wherever you see enlightened people, or newly enlightened people, you still try to reach him/her and invite him/her to come out and to share the Dharma with people. So you invite when we see unsurpassable people, when we see these lamps of the world, or we see those who are newly enlightened, I will come and beg them to turn the wheel of the Dharma, i. e. to go and share their experience. All the Buddhas said that ... "Oh, I already have taught enough. Now I want to go to Nirvana, I don't want to teach more." So you have to come and beg these Buddhas and say, "Please don't go to Nirvana. Please come and stay a few more years in order to help countless people, who are still in confusion." Wherever there is a number of Buddhas who want to enter into Nirvana, you go and make them come out and work again for those who suffer. Beg the Buddhas to agree to stay, not to stop the work yet. The seventh action is: Inviting all the Buddhas to remain and to teach, not to retire. For those who are enlightened, like Buddha, they are not victims of birth and death. For them ... they are already light, they are already the source of light. For them, if people see them pass away, they pretend to pass away. When they are born, they pretend to be born. But they are already that source of light and peace. They pretend to be born, they pretend to die. But they do not really die and are not really born. So when you look into the birth you see the death, you look deep into the death, you see the birth. You pretend to die you pretend to be born. In the Lotus Sutra there is the story of one physician who comes back home and who sees a number of his children who have been poisoned. They are severely poisoned and are dying quickly. But when he prepares some medicine for his children, some say, "Oh, I will not die yet. I will continue to eat this poisonous food." Then the father pretends to die. All the children are shocked that he is dying already... "So I'd better stop eating this poisonous thing and drink some of the medicine he prepared for me. Because if he passes away then nobody can help me." So he pretended to die. Many Buddhas are like that. They pretend to die. So all these Buddhas pretend to be born, to die." Last year in the Stoughbridge retreat in the UK, I told during Easter "Don't be so sad. Jesus only pretended to die. He did not really die." That was a praise from my part. But some Christians were very shocked, they said, "How do you dare to tell me that Jesus pretended to die?" And that is a phrase. Because Jesus can never die, he pretended to die. Because his twelve disciples were too superficial, they did not look deeply and so they thought that he died. You too, you do not try to practice. So one day I'll pretend to die, for you to practice better. So we know that the Buddha pretend to die, but we come and we say that "Please, we are still very confused, we still have a lot of craving, we need you to spend one more year with us, two more years, four more years..." We come and beg, request the Buddha to stay and not to die yet. So that is a very important practice in order to invite the Buddha to stay. We know that without the Buddha we will feel lost. So we beg the Buddha to remain with us in order for us to be solid. To those who are pretending to die, we sincerely request them to stay longer with us, in order to bring more teachings to the living beings.

we sincerely request them to stay longer with us, in order to bring more teachings to the living beings.

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# Questions and Answers

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Dear Sangha, today is the 27<sup>th</sup> of July, 1998, and we are in the New Hamlet for our question and answer period. I would like to take one question directly from the Sangha.

*The question is about the first of the Five Contemplations that we say before we eat: can we say that the food is not the gift of the sky and the earth, but the fruit of interdependence between different elements?*

I think that we can, but it is nice to feel grateful. When we enjoy eating an orange, we might feel grateful to the orange tree, which has spent a lot of time making a beautiful orange for us. So by thinking of giving and receiving, we can establish a deeper sense of relationship to the orange tree. We know that the orange tree also receives a lot of things from the clouds, the sunshine and the earth. In fact, everything that is has to rely on everything else in order to be and to grow. That is why I not only feel grateful for the orange tree, but I am also grateful for the clouds, the sunshine, the earth, and so on. We like the idea of being thankful to the cosmos, to everything that offers itself to us as food. That is why in Plum Village we organize a Thanksgiving Day, and we address our thanks to four objects: first of all to our father and our mother, who gave us life; to our teacher who gave us spiritual life and helped us know how to live in the here and now; we thank our friends who support us, especially in difficult moments, and we thank every being in the animal, vegetable and mineral world for our support and maintenance. So the Buddhists also celebrate Thanksgiving, with that kind of insight. And while we celebrate Thanksgiving, we relate to everyone who is there, and this is a very good practice so that we don't cut ourselves off from reality. The feeling of gratitude can help us to remember and to cultivate the element of compassion and loving kindness in us.

(Thay reads) *Dear Thay, I wish to know why there are no bicycles, and fewer cars, here in Plum Village.*

I also ask myself that question. In the first three years of Plum Village, there were a number of bicycle accidents. Many young people were injured and had to be taken to the hospital. In the beginning there was a lot of enthusiasm about bicycles, and I wanted each monk and each nun to have a bicycle of their own, but my dream has never been realized. So please help. Another question from the Sangha, please.

*This is a little bit personal to the Vietnamese community, especially in the United States, because I am from California. From my small experiences with many other Vietnamese people, we suffer greatly from alienation within our families, within the community because we are immigrants, between old and new, young and old. Many of my brothers and sisters in America also have a lack of roots-- we are like ghosts, you can say. So I was wondering if you could give me some advice to bring back to America.*

The immigrants have to make a lot of efforts to be integrated into the new society to which they have come. The first difficulty is the generation gap between parents and children. The parents were born in Vietnam, and the children may have been born in Vietnam, but they have left Vietnam at an early age, or they were born in the West. Many of them cannot communicate in their mother tongue, and parents are often very busy trying to make a living, so they do not have enough time to take care of their children, and to try to transmit to them the cultural values they have received from their ancestors. When they send the children into western society, to school, they don't have the time to follow, to support, to understand, and the way of thinking, speaking, and acting of the young people

very different from their parents. Sometimes it is very difficult for them to accept that. With the generation gap, there is a cultural gap, and if parents and children do not have time together to talk about that and to find a way to bridge the gap, then the difficulties will always increase.

I think the young people from immigrant families have to make an effort to be well versed in both cultures. They have to have a double culture—they have to learn the best things in the country where they live, but they also have to spend time to learn the best things in their root culture. If they possess that kind of double culture, they can swim like a fish, whether in the Western culture or in the Asian culture. If their parents are too busy to help them, they should come together and support each other in doing so. I think that in every culture there are positive things and negative things, and it is very easy to learn the negative things. For the jewels of that culture, you have to spend time, energy and a lot of patience in order to learn, and you need protection. This protection might come from a spiritual community, it can come from parents, or it can come from a group of people who are aware of the problem. That group might be made up of young people like you, who come together to discuss their real problems, instead of spending a lot of time in amusements. You might invite those who have insight, and who have experience in this matter, to shed light and give you advice on how you can grow up having a double culture. If you can rely on your Sangha, meaning your community, to go in that direction, one day you will be able to go home and help your own parents.

Your parents also have their own difficulties, and in order to lessen their difficulties it is very important to learn the practice that I proposed the other day: to learn the art of deep listening, and to learn the art of using calm and loving speech. By speaking with calm, and compassion, by listening deeply to the other person, you will be able to restore communication between yourself and your parents. It is only when both sides can talk to each other that issues can be resolved, and there will be collaboration between the two generations in order to lessen the difficulties, and to support each other.

(Bell)

*Society's definition of sexuality has always confused me. I feel much more at home with the more restricted and sacred role of sexuality within the Buddhist tradition. There is a question that still lingers in my mind: what is the essence and importance of sexuality?*

Last week in a Dharma talk I discussed what we call "empty sex." "Empty sex" means sex without love, without commitment, without communion or mutual understanding between the two parties. In our modern society sometimes very young people, twelve or thirteen, fourteen years old are already having sex. It seems to me that this is very dangerous, because that sex may be described as "empty sex." Once empty sex has been experienced, the chance of having deep communication, deep engagement, will be rare. I don't know how to solve this problem, but we have to come together in order to discuss this.

There is a tendency to believe that the feeling of loneliness in you can only be dissolved when you come together very close in a sexual relationship. I have even heard one person say that the best way to know a person is to have sex with him or her. When there is no sharing about deepest concerns, when there is no real communication, no mutual understanding of each other, and no serious commitment, I believe that sex is something very destructive. Because first of all you see that the coming together of two bodies cannot resolve that feeling of loneliness within yourself. Worse than that, it can create a gap between you and the other person, and your loneliness will be deeper; you will be frustrated, because in the beginning you thought that the coming together of two bodies will help you feel less lonely. But you'll find out very soon that that is not the way to remove the feeling of loneliness. Communication, mutual understanding, harmony, especially sharing the same ideals of life that can only be achieved by the practice of deep looking, deep listening. I would advise that if that kind of mutual understanding, that kind of intimate relationship between the two souls has not been achieved, then the coming together of the two bodies should not take place.

The sexual act can be very sacred, very beautiful, and also very spiritual, if it goes together with deep

deep aspiration. We know that sexuality is also to assure the continuation of our species, and the sexual energy in each person is just the natural tendency of the species. There are many people who get in trouble, because the sexual energy in them is too overwhelming, too strong. It is a kind of energy that you should know how to manage, to take care of, otherwise it will not let you be peaceful, it will push you to do and to say things that can cause a lot of damage. Many families have been destroyed, many children have been abused and will have to suffer all their lives, because people do not know how to handle their sexual energy.

As a Buddhist monk, I was taught that you need energy in order to study the Dharma, you need energy in order to practice sitting, contemplation, and so on. So, as a monk, you should know how to channel the amount of energy that you have into the direction of the studies and the practice. If you don't know how to channel it in that direction, it will go in the other direction, and you might be in trouble if you don't know how to manage and take care of your sexual energy. The Buddha advised the monks and the nuns not to eat in the evening, or to eat very little in the evening. That is partly because if you eat well at noon, if you chew the food very carefully, then you'll get enough nutrition. If you overeat, you'll have more energy than you need. In Plum Village our monks and nuns also practice working, using their physical strength, and also practice jogging and things like that. We learn how to take care of our bodies and our energy.

In Plum Village there is no television. The television set in Plum Village is only used for listening to Dharma talks. The TV sets here also practice. They only receive videotapes of Dharma talks; they don't receive other kinds of programs. They practice like the bell of mindfulness. They emit only the Dharma--they never diffuse the anti-Dharma stuff. In Plum Village you don't consume magazines and films and books that can arouse and water the seed of craving within yourself. You don't even sing love songs, that kind of love that brings you down. In Plum Village we sing a lot, but our songs always reflect the joy of the practice of the Dharma. In the practice centers this is very important also. We create an environment where everyone knows how to make the best of their energy. We are aware that people around us suffer a lot, and that is why we manage our time and energy, to use it in order to respond to the suffering around us. By doing so, we cultivate the energy of compassion within. Plum Village has programs to help hungry children, refugees, and people in many countries. Monks and nuns and others in Plum Village participate in that work; they get in touch with the suffering that is going on, and they also use their energy and time in helping people. Of course, they go around and organize days of mindfulness and mindfulness retreats, and that is also a way of helping. We try our best to use our energy, our time, and our resources, to alleviate the suffering inside us and around us.

I think the question concerning sexuality here is how to manage, how to take care of the sources of energy in us. In the beginning the kind of energy that we had was non-differentiated, but very soon that energy is channeled in many directions. If you know how to channel it in the direction of the practice, of learning, of helping the people who suffer around you, then you'll be alright, you'll have enough peace. But if you don't do that, sexual energy will be the main source of energy in you, you will have no peace, and you may cause suffering to yourself and suffering around you. That is why the Third Mindfulness Training, and the Fifth Mindfulness Training are linked to each other. Consumption and protecting the integrity of couples and children are linked together. If you don't know how to consume, then you don't know how to practice the kind of protection, which relates to the Third Mindfulness Training.

*What do you do when you're angry?*

That is a good question. When I am angry, I go back to my breathing. I breathe in, and breathe out mindfully. I know that anger is in me, that I should not say anything at that time. I should not do anything, because I know that doing or saying anything when I am angry is very dangerous. I refrain from acting and speaking because I could cause a lot of damage in me and in the other person. I think your question is the same as this one (Thay reads a written question):

*Dear Thay, sometimes I feel hurt by words or actions, and I get angry. In your books you say often that to remove your anger is dangerous. (Did I say so?—laughter.) I know for myself that if I don't speak about my difficulties, and*

*and if I just suppress my anger, I will suffer and my anger will come out in another way, and I risk exploding, or I get sick. In relation to the Peace Treaty, you say that we can express our anger only after we have taken good care of our anger. How is it possible to cultivate love and compassion and not to suppress our anger? In which way can we talk about our hurts? Is there a non-destructive way to express our anger?*

I would like to invite you to read that chapter on the Peace Treaty again. I don't think that in order to cultivate love and compassion you have to suppress your anger. I don't believe so. I don't think that we have to suppress our anger at all. I believe that we have to recognize our anger, to allow it to be, not to suppress it, and to learn how to embrace it. Embracing is not suppressing—embracing is taking good care of it. When your baby cries, you never want to suppress your baby. Your baby cries because your baby suffers. What you should do is to pick up your baby and hold it very dearly in your arms. That is exactly what I recommend to do when anger is there. Anger is like our baby, and we should not suppress it. We have to say, "My dear little anger, I know you are there. I will take good care of you. I am here for you." I do that with mindful breathing: "Breathing in, I know that anger is in me; breathing out, my anger, I will take good care of myself."

Anger is one block of energy in me, but the practice is for me to invite another kind of energy to come up, so that I can embrace my anger tenderly. The first energy is negative, the second energy is positive. The first energy is anger, and the second kind of energy is mindfulness: mindfulness of breathing and mindfulness of anger, embracing your anger with mindfulness. So you allow your anger to be, you recognize it as existing in you, you don't want to fight it. You recognize it. It has the right to be there. The baby has the right to cry. But you should not let your anger overwhelm you or be alone in you. That way you will suffer a lot, and you may do things that will cause a lot of damage. You may say things that will damage the relationship between you and the other person. That is why the wisest way is to recognize it, to allow it to be, and to embrace it tenderly: "Oh, my dear anger, I am here for you. I will take care of you, what is wrong?" You look deeply into it, you are attending to your anger, and you are not suppressing it.

In psychotherapy, people advise us to touch our anger, to allow our anger to be, to recognize our anger. But the question is, who will take care of the anger, who will recognize the anger, who will allow the anger to be? What is the agent that does the work of taking care, of recognizing? In the teaching of the Buddha it is very clear—the agent that is taking care of anger, recognizing and embracing anger is a kind of energy we call the energy of mindfulness. When you are angry, you have to practice mindfulness of anger. Mindfulness of anger means to be aware that anger is in you as an energy, and to recognize it, to allow it to be. You embrace it tenderly with the energy of mindfulness. The best way to do that is with mindful breathing, or mindful walking. Usually when we get angry we don't do that. We pay more attention to the person whom we think is the cause of our anger. But the Buddha advises us to go back and take good care of your anger. When your house is on fire, the most important thing for you to do is to go back to your house and try to put out the fire. The most important thing is not to run after the person that you believe to be the arsonist. That is what the Buddha recommended to us—to go home to ourselves and to take care of the fire inside. That is why during the time of practice--of going back, recognizing it, allowing to be, embracing it, looking deeply--if you do that, then you will not have the time to say or do anything. The Buddha recommended that we not say or do anything when we are angry, because that is dangerous. Go back and take care.

We have to be aware that our anger may be born from a wrong perception on our part. That happens often. The other person may not wish to make us suffer, to destroy us, or to punish us, but because we are not very attentive, we misunderstood him or her. That wrong perception is why we get angry at him or her, and we blame him or her as the cause of our suffering. That is something that can happen very often. That may be the first thing you discover when you look deeply into the nature of your anger. The second thing you may discover is that your seed of anger, the root of anger within you, is too strong. If a second person were listening to that sentence or seeing that act, he or she would not be as angry as you are, because the seed of anger in him or her is very small. You have a big seed of anger--which is why you get angry so easily. Therefore the main cause of your anger is not that person. The main cause of your anger and your misery is that the seed of anger is too strong in you. We have to recognize that in many people the seed of anger is small, but in other people the seed of anger is very big. The seed of anger in you may be the main cause, and the other person may be just a secondary cause.



If you continue to practice walking meditation, and mindful breathing and looking into your anger, your situation, you might find out other things. Other kinds of insight can come, such as your realization that the other person who has done that or said that to you, suffers a lot, and does not know how to handle his suffering. That is why he is spilling over his suffering to the people around. Anyone who happened to be in his environment would have to suffer, because that is a person who does not know how to handle his suffering, how to transform his suffering. That is why, while making himself suffer, he makes many people around him suffer also. You have learned the Dharma, you know how to practice mindful walking, to embrace your anger, you now feel much better already, but he is still in hell. So while practicing walking meditation you might recognize that, and be motivated by the desire to go back in order to help him or her, because he or she is still in hell. When you feel that you have to go back to help him, it means that your anger has been transformed into compassion. Thanks to your practice of looking deeply, of mindful walking, of mindful breathing. The other person may be your husband, your wife, your daughter, your father, your mother...if you don't help him, if you don't help her, who will? So, if you are motivated by the desire to go home and help him out, it means that your practice has borne fruit, and you should be joyful, because you have been successful in the practice.

About twelve years ago there was a young man who came to Plum Village and practiced. He was only twelve or thirteen years old. He came with his younger sister. That young man did not like his father at all, because every time he hurt himself while playing, instead of helping him, his father would shout at him: "You're stupid! How could you do such a thing?" and he told me, "To be a father, you have to be kind. When your child is suffering, you have to come to him and help him, and not shout at him and insult him like that. So I have decided that when I grow up to be a father, I will never do as he does. I will do the opposite." He was very sincere. One day his sister was playing in the Lower Hamlet, sitting in a hammock with another girl, and both of them fell out. His sister hit a large rock, and got hurt, with blood running from her forehead. The young man was there, and when he saw his sister like that, he suddenly became very angry. He was about to shout, "You stupid! Why did you do a thing like that?" But because he had been practicing in Plum Village every summer, he refrained from saying that, and when he saw someone taking care of his sister he walked away and practiced breathing and walking meditation. And during that walking meditation he found out very wonderful things. he

He could see that kind of anger in his father, but he also has that anger in him. If he does not practice, when he grows up to be a father, he will behave exactly like his father. That kind of seed of anger may have been transmitted to him by his father. That is what we call *Samsara*. He continued to practice walking alone. He found out that if he did not practice, he would not be able to transform that habit energy in himself, and he would behave exactly like his father. After some time he saw that his father may have also been the victim of a transmission: maybe the seed of anger in his father had been transmitted to him by his grandfather. For the first time understanding and compassion were born in that young man: "Oh, it may be that he is a victim of transmission, like me, and because he has not had a chance to practice he has transmitted that seed to me, and now if I don't practice I will transmit it to my children." At the moment that he saw that his father could be the object of transmission, a victim like him, his anger vis-à-vis his father suddenly dissolved, and he was motivated by the desire to go home to Switzerland and tell his father of what had happened, and invite his father to practice with him, in order to transform the habit energy in both father and son. I think that for a thirteen-year-old young man, that is a remarkable achievement of meditation.

Psychotherapists advise us to practice what they call "ventilation." Anger is a kind of smoke, a kind of energy in you, and you want to ventilate it so that the energy of anger will leave. "Get it out of your system," they advise us. So many psychotherapists advise this type of practice: you to go to your room, be sure that no one is in the room, lock the door, take a pillow, and use all your might to pound on the pillow, imagining the pillow as the object of your anger. If you continue to pound on the pillow with all of your might, then half an hour later they say you will get relief. In fact, you do get relief, because you are exhausted—you have no energy left to be angry. But the root of anger in you is still the same, if not stronger, because in the half hour of pounding the pillow you are making it grow bigger and bigger. To do that is not taking it out of your system, it is rehearsing your anger. If you are hungry and you go out to the refrigerator and get something to eat, and drink milk, and one hour later you will seem to be okay. But if someone comes and waters the seed of anger in you, you will get angry. You may get angrier than you

pounding the pillow, you make the seed of anger in you grow. That is why it's dangerous. We are advised to get in touch with our anger. That's good—it's good to be aware of our anger, to embrace our anger. But in this case you are not really in touch with your anger, you are allowing yourself to be overwhelmed by your anger. You are not even in touch with the pillow, because if you were really in touch with the pillow, you would know that it's only a pillow, and if you know it's a pillow, you would not have the nerve to pound into it like that.

It's very important to learn how to embrace our anger, and practice looking deeply in order to find the roots of our anger. The Peace Treaty is very important. Many couples who come to Plum Village, husband and wife, father and son, mother and daughter, have studied the Peace Treaty. I don't have the time to go into a lot of details on the Peace Treaty, but many of them have signed the Peace Treaty after having studied it, and signed it in the presence of the whole Sangha, and they have done wonderfully because the Peace Treaty has helped them to protect themselves and deal with anger in a very intelligent way. And their happiness and harmony have always increased with the practice of the Peace Treaty. We have gotten many reports. Young couples who get married in Plum Village always advised to practice Flower Watering, Insight Offering, and the Peace Treaty. Any time there is anger, the Peace Treaty should be put into practice.

One item in the Peace Treaty says that when you get angry, you go back to your mindful breathing, you don't say anything yet, you don't do anything yet, and after that, when you feel that you are calm, you will go and tell him or her that you are angry and you want him or her to know it. You tell him or her that on Friday night you would like to practice looking deeply with him or her on the matter of your anger. If you are not calm yet, you have to write it down on a piece of paper: "Darling, I am angry. I am suffering very much, and I want you to know it. Let us practice looking deeply together, each of us in our own way, and this Friday night we'll have a chance to look deeply together." After having told him or her, or after having written that peace note to him or her, you'll feel much better already. And from now until Friday night both of you will know that you have to meet; therefore, from now until then, you have time to practice looking deeply. If before Friday night you have an insight, you have to telephone or fax her right away, so she can have relief as soon as possible.

Long answer! (*Laughter.*)

*My question is also about anger. What can we do when we're with somebody who is angry with us? For example, I have a very close friend, and sometimes she's very angry and I'm aware that she's angry. I think that sometimes it's not related to something that I'm doing, or it's related to something that I don't know about. When she's angry I feel terrible, and I want to go away and think a lot of negative things. So my question is what can we do for a person when they are very angry, and also, how can we protect ourselves? Also with that person, my parents sometimes say very negative things that make me feel bad.*

When you are in deep relationship with someone you have to try to understand him or her deeply. Deep understanding of that person helps you to behave in a way that will relieve that person from his or her suffering, and also can bring joy and happiness to him or her. So you have to be concerned. You have to try looking deeply at that person, with his or her help. The suffering that she has within herself is your problem also, because if you don't help her transform that suffering in her, not only will she continue to suffer, but you will also continue to suffer. So find a time when both of you are joyful, and sit down and really take a look at it: "My dear friend, you have suffering within yourself. The anger in you makes you suffer, and of course I cannot be happy when I see you suffer like that. Therefore, let us practice looking deeply into the roots of that anger." You do as a therapist would, trying to listen very carefully, with a lot of patience, listen without judgment, without condemnation, without criticizing, and both of you may come to a deep understanding of that suffering, how it has come to be. The Buddha said that when you already see the real cause of the suffering, you are in a position to see the way out. There must be some way of living, of practicing, of dealing with it, for that block of anger not to grow, and to be dissolved little by little. What kind of daily practice can she do on her own? What kind of daily practice can you do together with her, as a couple of friends? What kind of community, of Sangha, can you be affiliated with in order to strengthen your practice? What kind of books on the Dharma, what kind of Dharma talks, what kind of teacher do you need in order to strengthen your practice? These are all related questions that can help you, and help the person you love.

*Cher Thay, pourriez-vous nous parler de celui qui fait votre maitre spirituel dans la tradition Bouddhique? (Thay, would you tell us about your teacher in the Buddhist tradition?)*

My teacher was a very kind person. During the whole relationship he never shouted at me. He was a very gentle person. He was the youngest student of his teacher. In fact, when his teacher passed away, he was still not ordained by him, so his big brothers in the Dharma, just a few hours after the passing away of his teacher, organized an ordination ceremony in order for him to become a novice monk. That is why my teacher bore the name, "The last who bears the name of Thanh." Thanh means purity. All of his big brothers in the Dharma had a Dharma name beginning with the word "Thanh." So he was the last disciple with the Dharma name beginning with the word Thanh.

I became a novice monk at the age of sixteen, and he gave me a Dharma name that I did not like very much, because of my ignorance. My Dharma name is Phung Xuan that is "going to meet spring." I thought that that name was a little bit more appropriate for girls, not for boys. But finally I found out that his intention was that the practice should bring the spring, and not the winter, meaning that loving kindness and compassion have the power of reviving the things that are dying: when spring comes everything will be revived. The practice should be refreshing, and able to bring rebirth to society.

I would like to tell you a story concerning my teacher. I was his attendant for three months. One day I was bringing him lunch, and I forgot to put a pair of chopsticks on his tray. As you know, if you don't put a pair of chopsticks with a Vietnamese meal, it is difficult to eat. I was still a naïve novice. You are supposed to stand behind your teacher about two meters, ready to do anything for him, in case he needs anything. I thought that standing there doing nothing was a waste of time, so I was holding a sutra, and I tried to make use of the time by learning the sutra. I did not know that my teacher was eating without chopsticks. He was using his spoon to eat his rice, and so on. Finally, he finished, and he called me: "Dear novice." I said, "Yes." He asked me if there were still bamboo trees in the garden. I said, "Yes, there are a lot of bamboo trees in the garden." He said, "In that case, after having lunch, go and cut one bamboo tree." I said, "Yes, I will do that, my teacher." But one minute later I asked myself, "What is the use of cutting a bamboo tree?" So I asked, "Dear Teacher, what is the use of cutting a bamboo tree?" and he said, "In order to make some chopsticks. Don't you see, novice, there are no chopsticks on my tray." I was very scared. A big mistake; it was my poor practice of mindfulness. So I never forgot them again.

There was another time when he asked me to do something for him, and I was very eager to go and do it for him right away, so I did not close the door behind me mindfully. He called me back gently, and said, "Novice, this time you go out and close the door better than that." I knew that mindfulness practice is the basic practice, so I was very mindful this time; I made each step mindfully, I turned the knob mindfully, I opened the door mindfully, I stepped out mindfully, and I closed the door mindfully. And he did not need to teach me a second time. From that time on I knew how to close a door.

I have to tell you this also because it has to do with closing the door. One day in 1966 I visited the Trappist monk Thomas Merton in his monastery in Kentucky, and we spent two days and one night together. After that he gave a talk to the monks in Gethsemani, and he said something like, "When you see Thich Nhat Hanh closing a door, you know that he is a real monk." A few years ago a lady from Germany came here to Plum Village and practiced during the winter. She stayed with us for three weeks. On the day of her departure, after a formal lunch, she was asked to express some feelings about her stay. She said that the reason she had come to Plum Village was because she had read something by Thomas Merton about my way of closing the door, and she wanted to come just to see how I closed the door. She was staying in the New Hamlet, and no one among us was aware that she was observing us closing our doors, until the moment when she revealed the secret. She said that she had been very happy being with us for three weeks, that she had come only with the intention of seeing how we closed the door behind us. You know, all of this comes from my teacher. If you look at me, and you look at monks and nuns who are my students, you can see my teacher somehow—he's still there around us.

(Bell)

*I work as a psychotherapist with women who were abused, and we use the practice that they are allowed to scream their anger and their sadness out, but we also do it in such a way that we embrace them while doing it. The first time I worked there and asked them to breathe deep, they just freaked out, because they stopped breathing not to feel their bodies anymore, not to feel the sadness. I also think it's necessary not to do it all the time, because it (the anger) is growing, but I didn't have the feeling that the anger was growing when they were allowed to do it with somebody is feeling it with them. I think it's necessary that they are asked to try to transform it, but I think that this is the next step. I have the feeling that before this step they must be allowed to show it, because they have no feeling anymore in their bodies. If they are allowed to show the blocked feelings in their bodies...they connect with their bodies again. This was my experience, and I wanted to share this with you, because I also think it's necessary to transform our anger, but I think when they have so much sadness in their bodies, it's not so easy just to embrace it.*

I know that sometimes it's very difficult to embrace your anger, and there are those who cannot embrace their anger. That does not mean that it is impossible to embrace your anger. If you don't practice mindfulness, what kind of energy do you have in order to embrace your anger? Most of your clients do not practice mindfulness of breathing, mindfulness of walking, mindfulness of eating. That they cannot embrace their anger easily is very normal. I think the therapist should set an example: the therapist should show that when you have the energy of mindfulness, you can embrace your anger very well. It is very important to know that in many of us the blocks of pain are too important--pain, despair, anxiety and fear—and we do not have the courage to go back to ourselves, because we are afraid of touching the blocks of suffering within us. Our daily practice is to try to run away from ourselves: we turn on the television, we pick up a novel to read, we take a car to go out, we engage in any kind of conversation, trying to escape ourselves.

For a person like that, to go back and embrace her anger is quite impossible. She has nothing with which to go back. If she goes back, she'll find herself overwhelmed by the amount of pain and anger and sorrow within her. In order to go back you need to be equipped with something, and that something is exactly the energy of mindfulness recommended by the Buddha. If you have that energy of mindfulness, you can go home and embrace your fear, your anger, and your despair. When you find yourself in a community of practitioners, you see that everyone is practicing that, and therefore you can allow yourself to practice the same way. In a practice center, we learn first of all to touch the positive elements in order to get nourishment.

The positive elements exist inside of us also—pain and suffering is just one side of it. The other side still possesses positive things. So the therapist, or the Dharma brother, can help you to identify the things that are not wrong in yourself. You may have the idea that everything in you goes wrong. But that is not true—there are things in you that have not gone wrong yet. There are things around us that have not gone wrong yet. The first practice is to rely on the Sangha, on brothers and sisters in the community, in order to be able to touch the positive elements within and around, for your nourishment. When you get a little bit stronger, you can re-establish the balance; by practicing getting in touch with the positive aspect, you continue to cultivate the energy of mindfulness in yourself, and you will be able to go home to yourself and embrace whatever is painful within you. Sometimes you can profit from the energy of mindfulness of other people. If your mindfulness is not strong enough for you to hold that pain within yourself, then a few brothers and sisters who sit with you and lend their power of mindfulness will help you to do so: "Courage, my brother, courage, my sister, we are here and we support you and going back to your pain to embrace it." I think that is to make use of the collective energy of the group, so your mindfulness energy will be strong enough to embrace the energy within you.

I think the insight is the same, but the practice should be realistic and intelligent. It is possible for many of us to go home to ourselves and embrace our pain, because we have practiced mindfulness. The seed of mindfulness in us has become strong enough, so that every time we begin to practice mindful breathing and mindful walking, we have enough energy to do it. And once you have done it, then you will not be afraid any more. If it happens once that you have come home, and if you can hold your pain tenderly, breathing in and breathing out, then the next time you will

not be afraid. You will have confidence that you can go home to yourself, and you can do it the second time and the third time. But in the beginning, if you don't know whether you are strong enough to do it alone, then always ask a sister or a brother who is good in the practice to sit there with you to support you. It is like your child—if you tell her to practice breathing in and breathing out, to be aware of the rising and falling of her stomach, she may not be able to do it alone. But you can hold her hand, and say, "Darling, do this with Mommy: let us breathe in and become aware of the rising, and breathing out, be aware of the falling..." You will be a tremendous source of support to her, and she can do it, even if she is still a child. That is why the support of someone else in the community is very important.

*My question is about guilt feelings. If you have someone who has so carefully watered his guilt seeds that they have become a huge tree, how would you advise this person who even feels guilty about feeling guilt?*

In Buddhist psychology, the recognition that you have done something wrong, and feeling sorry for it, may be a good, positive energy. It is one of the mental formations identified as "indeterminate," because it may be good, or it may be bad. But if that feeling becomes a kind of prison, a complex of guilt, not allowing you to do anything, if you are caught by it, then it becomes something negative. With the awareness that you have done something wrong, that doing something wrong has caused suffering within you, and to people around you, and if you are motivated by the desire not to do it anymore, not to repeat it anymore, then you can achieve a transformation. You commit yourself not to do it, and not only not to do it, but to do the opposite. Then you can get the transformation and healing that you wish.

During the war in Vietnam, an American soldier got very angry because many of his people had died in an ambush organized by guerrillas. Because of that anger he tried to take revenge by creating an ambush of his own. So he came to the village where the ambush had happened, and he left a bag of sandwiches at the entrance of the village, and hid behind the trees and observed. He had put explosives into the sandwiches. They were very good sandwiches, but he opened every sandwich and put explosives into it. He really did not know what he was doing, being carried away completely by his anger and his wish to take revenge. A group of children passed by and found the sandwiches, and they shared the sandwiches with each other. Five minutes after eating, they began to hold their stomachs and they cried and cried, and the parents came. This was a remote village. The parents tried to find a car to transport the children to the nearest hospital, which was several dozen kilometers away. The soldier knew perfectly well that there was no way to rescue them. Five children died because of his so-called ambush.

He could not tell anyone that story of what he had experienced in Vietnam. For more than ten years he was not at peace with himself. Every time he found himself sitting in a room with children, he could not bear it, and he had to run out of the room. This continued until the day that he came to a retreat organized by Plum Village in southern California. That retreat was organized especially for Vietnam veterans. Their psychotherapists and their families also came to support their practice. They organized into small groups of five or six people, and we asked many Vietnamese people living in surrounding communities to come and support us. We practiced sitting very still, and listening very deeply, and gave them a chance to speak out. There were people who sat there for half an hour, forty-five minutes, even more than an hour, without being able to say anything. There was a veteran who joined the walking meditation, but who did not want to mix with us, because he was afraid of an ambush. So he followed us from far away, about ten meters behind, so that if something happened he could still run away. There was another veteran who did not dare to sleep in a dormitory; he had to camp in the woods nearby, and he set up booby traps around him, in order to feel safe.

The war veteran who had killed five children was able to tell the story to us, after making a lot of efforts. I told him this: "Okay, you have killed five children, and you feel sorry for it. But I want you to know that children continue to die every day, today, and not only in the Third World, but also in America. Many children are being abused; many children die for different reasons. There are children who die just because they need one dose of medicine that they cannot afford. Do you know that if you want to, you could save five or ten children every day? Why do you get caught in that complex of guilt, and destroy your life? You are still young, and you can do something. It is good to see that you have done something wrong, and to regret it. But that is not enough, because there are practical things

you can do to help children. If you want, we will tell you what to do in order to save five children today, and five children tomorrow. If you practice like that for a few months, you will see the five children who died in Vietnam smiling in you, and you will get transformation and healing.

So, to make a commitment not to do it anymore, and to make a commitment to do the opposite, will bring you a lot of energy. From the very moment that you kneel down and receive the Five Mindfulness Trainings, you become a bodhisattva, you become a great being. You may be filled with energy, because you are going out there as a bodhisattva, using your life to bring relief to many people who really need you, instead of allowing yourself to be trapped in that prison of guilt. In your daily life, you can free yourself and become someone full of energy, full of compassion.

Whatever the nature of your suffering, whatever the mistakes you have made, whatever categories they belong to, you can practice the same way. You make a commitment not to do it anymore, and you make a commitment to do the opposite, transforming yourself into an instrument of love and understanding. In the moment when you kneel down and receive the Five Mindfulness Trainings, you can be another person. Transformation can take place right from the very beginning. Many people, at the moment they receive Mindfulness Trainings, feel wonderful, as though they are new beings, because of that energy we call the vow, the determination to live our lives in such a way as to bring relief to many people who suffer.

( Three Bells)

(End of Dharma talk)



Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# Touching the Energy of the Bodhisattvas

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Winter Retreat 1997/98 21 December 1997

Translated from Vietnamese into English by Sister Annabel

Dear Sangha, today is the 21 December 1997, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. Last time we talked about prostrating to Buddha Shakyamuni. The word Muni means silent. The basis of a monk is silence. So in fact Muni means monk, and Shakyamuni means a monk of the Sakya clan. "In one pointed mind I bow in respect to Maitreya Buddha. The name Maitreya means the person who loves; we say Mr. Love. Maitreya comes from the word maitri, which in Sanskrit means loving kindness, being able to offer a feeling of joy. Maitreya is the Buddha of the future. And in the Vietnamese tradition the beginning of the New Year is an anniversary symbolizing the day when we welcome the presence of the future Buddha, Maitreya.

"With one pointed mind I bow down before Manjusri." Manjusri stands for the eyes of understanding. "With one pointed mind I bow down before Samantabhadra." Samantabhadra stands for action. "With one pointed mind I bow down before Sadapaributha." Sadapaributha stands for the wisdom in which there is the recognition that in everyone there is the capacity to become Buddha; enough seeds, enough love and understanding to become Buddha. So we do not despise anyone. And finally we bow down to all the ancestral teachers beginning from India to the present day in Vietnam. This contains all our ancestral teachers from Buddha to Mahakashyapa, Shariputra, Upali, Maudgalyayana; all the Chinese, Indian and Vietnamese meditation teachers. And when we touch the earth this time we're in touch with all those ancestral teachers. So, in Monday mornings chanting we bow down to Shakyamuni, Maitreya, Manjusri, Samantabhadra, Sadapaributha, and all the ancestral teachers of all ages.

In these six bows we have to have a fruit. We should not prostrate mechanically. After we have prostrated we should be something different than before we prostrated. We should breathe in and out three times when we touch the earth in order to look deeply, be in touch and receive the energy of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, because this is a very effective method of transformation. The secret of prostrating is that when our head, arms and legs are touching the earth we let go. We let go of our idea of our self; we let go of everything, which we call my idea of myself, my person, or my worth. Sometimes we think that we are alone and lonely, but when we are touching the earth with five limbs we have to open our self up, open all the doors of our body and our mind, and the idea about self has to be dissolved. And then prostrating is successful, and the energy of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas and ancestral teachers can enter us. That does not mean that the energy of Buddhas, bodhisattvas and ancestral teachers is outside, that we have to open the door to let them in. In fact that energy is present within us. But if we don't allow it, it will not manifest.

within us. But if we don't allow it, it will not manifest.

For instance the energy of our father. The energy of our father is in us. It is in each of the cells of our body. Our father has both physical energy and spiritual energy, and that energy is in each cell of our body. Sometimes people have a father who has lived to be ninety years old and that father has never had cancer. All his cells are in us. And if we are afraid we have difficulties in our own flesh we could call on the energy of our father to come back to us and enter each cell of our body and do its work of healing. Our father has spiritual energy such as joy, skills, and capacities. But because we are angry with our father that energy of our father is closed up in our cells. When we prostrate we let go of all that anger, we let go of our idea of self, and the energy of our father becomes real in us and we can benefit from that energy. The energy of our teacher is the same. Our teacher has energy. And our teacher's energy is in each cell of our body. We may be angry with our teacher, or we feel far from our teacher. And those feelings mean that the energy of our teacher is shut up. But when we bow down we open up so that energy can emerge. The energy of Buddha is the same. The energy of Buddha is in each cell of our body. And therefore we need only to open the door of our soul and the energy of the Buddha will reveal itself. So prostrating is a very important practice and we have to learn to practice it correctly.

When we are prostrating our forehead should be touching the floor, and our two hands and our two feet should be touching the floor. We should be as close to the floor as possible, we should not leave any space between our body and the floor. And we have to let go of everything. We have to surrender our self and not hold anything back, which we consider to be "mine". All my inferiority complexes, my pride, everything I think that I am, all that I think my value is I let go of it and I become emptiness, and then the door opens and the energy of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas and ancestral teachers can be transmitted. If we keep our pride, our inferiority complex, that we have achieved this, we have achieved that, if we hold on to our anger, our hatred when we are touching the earth, then that stiff shell is still there and the prostrating has no fruit. So we have to let go of everything and then our body and our mind can be open. When our forehead is touching the earth and our two hands are touching the earth we open our hands to show that we are not hiding anything, holding anything, we have let go of everything. And our two hands have to be straight, opened up (and some people lift their hands up a little bit) to show I am not holding anything, I have wholly let go of everything, all my ideas about myself. And then you can join the stream, the spiritual stream or the life stream of your ancestors. Because we are cut off from that stream when we are lonely and caught in ideas of our self.

When we prostrate we have to be wholly there, and our body should be one with our mind, otherwise we prostrate like a machine, mechanically. Being wholly there means mindfulness, Right Mindfulness, which means the presence of body and mind as a unity. We stand before the Buddhas and the bodhisattvas. Our heart is mindfulness, we are really authentically present, and our mind is not in the past or in the future. We are not swept away or caught in our worries or our thinking. We bring our mind and body back to one place to be present with the Buddhas, the bodhisattvas and the object of our respect. And Right Mindfulness gives rise to a field of energy which is great, and that allows us to be in touch.

Buddha Shakyamuni represents our aim, our point of arrival; that is, the absolute, the upward direction. There are two directions, Buddha represents the upper direction, and Mara represents the lower direction. There are moments in our life when our body and mind are going in the direction of Mara, when we are sad, when we are worrying, when we are going in a non-constructive way. For example we see on the table a very tasty dish. We have enough clarity to know that if we eat that dish we will receive unpleasant consequences. We know that very clearly. Our wisdom knows that if we eat that tonight we know what will happen. But there is another force which says: "Go on, eat it, what happens afterward will happen, there's always a medicine you can take." So there is a difference between the two. Wisdom says: "You shouldn't eat that." And then the other one says: "Why don't you eat it, go on, have it, let's live the present moment." And at that moment we can choose whether we go in the upper direction or the lower direction, it's up to us. And it depends whether we have the energy of mindfulness, whether our body and mind is together, because that will give us the opportunity to go in the upper direction. But if our mindfulness is weak then we don't have the force to go in the upper direction. And sometimes we go backward and forward all day long. So mindfulness helps us to have stable energy to go in the upper



upper direction. And sometimes we go backward and forward all day long. So mindfulness helps us to have stable energy to go in the upper direction. Shakyamuni Buddha represents the upper direction. When we know our body and our mind are going in that direction we have faith and joy, which nourishes us. And when we touch the earth, one prostration, two, five, six prostrations, we know this practice is taking us in the upper direction. And when we know that we are going in the upper direction we feel at peace in our mind, we have stability and we are happy. And while we are prostrating we nourish that stability, that peace of mind and that happiness. And we are successful because of the energy of mindfulness.

We have a bodhisattva whose name is Manjusri. In the Prajñāpāramitā school the position of Manjusri is very high, because Manjusri is Great Wisdom, and Prajñāpāramitā means the wisdom, which takes us across. He can be symbolized by an eye, the eye of wisdom. Manjusri is the eye of wisdom of the Buddha. As far as history is concerned it may be different, but as far as the ultimate dimension is concerned we should know that the element of Manjusri is the element of wisdom in Buddha Shakyamuni. So Buddha Shakyamuni and Manjusri are the same. And when we touch the earth before Manjusri we are turning also toward our own capacity to wake up and become Buddha. The object of our prostration is not the statue of Manjusri on the altar. The object of our prostration is to be in touch with the element of Manjusri, which is in us, that is, the wisdom of the Buddha. "With one mind I bow down before Manjusri, the bodhisattva of Great Wisdom." And we see clearly that we are going in the energy of Great Wisdom when we do that, and our Right Mindfulness helps us to be in touch with bodhisattva Manjusri.

We have another bodhisattva whose name is Avalokitesvara. Avalokitesvara symbolizes another hand of the Buddha, and that is the hand of love and compassion. We can say that Avalokitesvara is Buddha; Avalokitesvara is the hand of love of the Buddha, because the Buddha is complete love and understanding. Usually Avalokitesvara is symbolized by an ear, because Avalokitesvara has the capacity to listen to the suffering of people, to understand, and to find them and help them. When we prostrate to Quan The Am (Avalokitesvara) we are in touch with the energy of love in our self. We see we have the capacity to listen deeply, to love and to understand. First of all to listen to our self, to hear our self and love our self. Because if we cannot understand and love our self how do we have the energy to love and understand others. So these sources of energy are all energies of the Buddha, and they are all in us. Manjusri is Buddha Avalokitesvara is also Buddha. Therefore you can understand that in the sutra it says that Manjusri had become a Buddha a long time ago, and Avalokitesvara had become a Buddha a long time ago, before the Buddha became a Buddha; that is because they are Buddha.

Another bodhisattva is called Samantabhadra, which means universal kindness. It is the energy of the great vow, great aspiration, and Great Action. Therefore Samantabhadra is symbolized by a hand, the hand of action. And when we prostrate before Samantabhadra we are in touch with the energy of the aspiration and the action of Buddha, and Samantabhadra is the hand of the Buddha. Buddha is Great Understanding, Great Compassion and Great Action.

Alongside them we have another bodhisattva whose name is Ksitigarbha. Ksitigarbha is a bodhisattva who has a great aspiration. His aspiration is to be present wherever there is suffering, wherever there is hell; it could be our office. Therefore Ksitigarbha represents a Great Vow, Great Aspiration. A Great Vow is a great energy, and when we have the energy of Great Vow we are strong, we will not fall down before any difficulty. Even if it's cold below freezing we still go out. If there are thousands of obstacles on our path we still overcome them. When the mountains fall we still continue. Because in us we have a great vow. So we have Great Compassion, Great Understanding, Great Vow and Great Action, and those four things are what make Buddha. And in us it's the same, we all have these essences in us, Buddha is in us. And when we touch the earth, prostrate, we are in touch with these things in our self.

Sadapaributha means always not despising; he dared never to despise a living being. He does not dare to despise a profane person, because that profane person also has the matter of awakening in them. The raw materials of awakening in that person have not yet been watered and looked after so they haven't developed. That's why we call that person a profane person. But when we look at a profane person we should see these other things in them. You remember in the [Vajraccedika Sutra](#) ("The Diamond Sutra")

person we should see these other things in them. You remember in the [Vajraccedika Sutra](#) ("The **Diamond Sutra**") it says: "Because the Tathágata does not see a profane person as a profane person, that is why they are a profane person." So when we look at someone we look with that wisdom. We can join our palms and bow before any living being. Sadapaributha, never disparaging, does not dare to despise anyone.

If we don't have the energy of mindfulness we cannot be in touch with the great bodhisattvas. So while we are in touch with them as we prostrate our mindfulness needs to be complete, overflowing. If you don't know how to prostrate, then tonight when you have a chance please practice and learn how to do it. When we are standing and we join our palms and hear the words: "With one pointed mind I bow down before Manjusri" we already begin to visualize, to see that raw material, that hand of the Buddha, that energy of wisdom. We bring all our body and mind to one point, and we are in touch with that energy. Our hands are like a lotus bud, we touch our forehead: "With all our brain". We bring our hands down to our heart and we are in touch with our heart: "With all our heart". It means we take our brain, we take our heart, and then we put our two hands out to the side and touch the earth. And when our two feet, our two hands and our head are touching the earth we turn our hands upwards very straight, to show that we don't retain anything, we haven't held back anything of our self. And we open the doors of our soul, of our body, all the cells in our body, in order to receive the energy of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, which is already in our body, so that it can circulate in our body. And as we touch the earth we breathe in and out three times to look deeply. While we are on the earth we need to be really there, we need to follow our breathing, we need to allow the energy of the Buddhas, the bodhisattvas, the ancestral teachers to manifest. And after we prostrate like that we will be a different person. After three breaths in and out there will be a stopping of the bell, and at that point we turn our two hands around to put them on the earth, and we stand up.

Those of you who invite the bell should practice to do it solidly so that the three breaths are allowed while somebody is touching the earth. We can measure the three breaths of the Sangha by our own breath, and if you want to be sure you can add another breath, because some people have a longer breath than others. This afternoon if you have an opportunity you can practice together, especially those of you who don't know how to prostrate yet, you can call it touching the earth. And in that way we do not lose our time. We do not use prostrations to pray or ask for something, but to help us to mature, to grow up, and to make us strong; it is not to lessen our value. And the success of our prostrating depends if we have been able to let go of all our ideas and all the value we put on our self. And the final touching of the earth is touching the earth before the ancestral teachers from India to Vietnam. We have ancestral teachers, and we suffer and we are lonely when we are cut off from that stream of ancestral teachers. So when we put our self in the position of touching the earth, we open our heart and our body in order to receive the stream of the ancestral teachers, and that loneliness, that suffering will dissipate, and this is a very healing prostration.

We know that the bodhisattva Manjusri is present in the [Great Prajñápáramitá Sutra](#) and "The **Ratnakuta Sutra**." [This is one of the oldest sutras, which belongs to the Vaipulya group of forty-nine independent sutras. Summary: The philosophy of the middle is developed, which later becomes the basis for the Madhyamika teaching of Nargarjuna. It contains sutras on transcendental wisdom (Prajñápáramitá Sutra) and the Longer Amitabha Sutra.--BIONA Editor]

And that Samantabhadra is in the [Avatamsaka Sutra](#), and Satapaributha is present in the Lotus Sutra. If we want to know more about these bodhisattvas we should study the Prajñápáramitá, the Avatamsaka and [The Lotus Sutra](#).

Now we will go on to the Refuge Chant. In the Vietnamese text we have words "to go back", "to take refuge", and also "to give rise to aspiration". We need to take refuge in order to have safety and security, and we need to make a vow in order to have strength; we need these two things. So, we go back to our self and then we have the energy to go forward. This is the atmosphere in which we nourish our self, where the meditation hall is "full of the scent of sandalwood, and the lotus opens so that Buddha can appear." This atmosphere is thanks to the person who looks after the Buddha hall and makes it beautiful. And this virtue of looking after the Buddha hall helps us in our visualization. We have to visualize the conditions and the environment; we have to be able to see by means of images and not by means of

and not by means of ideas. We know that the basis of poetry is images. If you write a poem and you only use ordinary words, it's not enough. Poems are written by images. If you say: "This afternoon I am sad" it's not enough. You have to say: "Today I am a gray cloud" or something like that. So, when you join your palms you have to set up the kind of surroundings where you will be able to realize your aspiration. So we make the Buddha hall very fragrant so that it is worthy of the presence of a Buddha or a bodhisattva. "The lotus opens and the Buddha is revealed." In our old liturgy it says: "When the flower opens we see the Buddha." This is the teaching of the Pure Land. On the altar there are flowers. If there aren't lotuses we visualize lotus. But Buddha is revealed not only when the lotus is opened. The Buddha Shakyamuni can reveal in any flower, in a little purple flower on the path, the tiny flower close to the earth. There are many opportunities for the Buddha to reveal. It's only our eyes, which aren't able to see the Buddha; the Buddha can reveal himself at any moment. It's because of our ignorance, because we are caught in our worries and our difficulties that we cannot see the Buddha in the flower. Especially when that flower is our heart. Because our heart is a flower, and our heart can open at any moment. "The lotus opens and the Buddha appears." This is a very wonderful image of the Buddha. And when we join our palms and visualize, Buddha will be there, because our mindfulness is there. And we should not complain that we have been born too late, two thousand six hundred years after the Buddha. We don't complain, because we know very well that when we are really there the Buddha is also there.

"The dharma realms become purified." That means the realms of suffering disappear and the pure Dharma realms appear. The suffering realms disappear because the Buddha has appeared. And when the Buddha appears the dharma realms appear. And we distinguish between lokadhatu and Dharmadhatu. Loka is the world; the worldly world Dhatu is the realm. So this is the field of suffering, of separation, where blood is spilt because of separation, it's the world where we see this lies outside of that, where older brother is not younger brother, father is not son, trees are not humans, that is the world where we separate one thing from another, where we discriminate. And that is why anger and division take place and there is wounding. And then there is the Dharmadhatu. This is the world where Buddha is, and therefore older brother is younger brother, father is son, people are trees, you can see people in grass and you can see grass in people, you can see father in son, you can see son in father, you can see elder brother in younger brother. Because the light of the Buddha is there for us to see by. And when there is not the path of division, there is not the separating barrier, when there isn't the suffering of division there is happiness. And we join our palms to visualize, to see the Dharma hall full of the perfume of sandalwood, to see the lotus open with the Buddha, and to see the world of suffering becoming the dharma realms. That means we see the pure dharma realms. The karma which has brought suffering to living beings in the world calms down, and among those living beings we include our self. It means that the energy of our action has led us to suffering but now we feel lightened from this. In Vietnamese we say: "the calmness of the dust of the world." In the chant called "Taking Refuge with My Life" we have a phrase which says: "The karma of the dusty world does not do harm to us." The worldly dust with all its fetters, all its wounds. The world of men has wounds and fetters and it is called the world of dust for that reason. And dust has its color; it's called the red dust. When we become a monk or a nun we go in the direction of beauty. So why are we still caught in the red dust? The red dust is the fire of craving, the fire of sensual pleasure. When we become a monk or a nun we have coolness, so why do we go back and step into the dust of craving? We have to practice visualization in this chant for the surroundings to appear. Many things are there in these four lines. If we chant them like a parrot it's a great waste.

"The disciple with one pointed mind turns in the direction of the Three Jewels. Buddha is the teacher showing the way." This is meditating on the Buddha. It is called remembrance or recollection of Buddha. It's a practice of meditation. When we're chanting the sutra it's also a practice of meditation. Some people practice chanting like a parrot and that is not meditation. But if we practice looking deeply as we chant that is meditation. So "with a collected mind I turn to the Three Jewels". Here the word "collected" means to be wholly present. If you're not really there, you're pretending. If you are joining your palms with your body, and your mind is thinking about tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, that is a pretence. It means to be wholly there, mindfulness is there and concentration is there. Sometimes we are not collected and we think we are collected. We think we're not deceiving anybody. We think: "I am true, I am really there." But maybe I'm not really there, because I haven't got concentration and mindfulness. "My body and my mind are one" means I am not thinking about other things, I'm not angry with my brothers and sisters, I'm not worrying about tomorrow, I'm not regretting yesterday. And that is called

things, I'm not angry with my brothers and sisters, I'm not worrying about tomorrow, I'm not regretting yesterday. And that is called collected mind, one pointed mind.

When we have a one pointed mind we can turn to the Three Jewels. In Sanskrit it's triratna. Tri means three ratna means a jewel. "Buddha is the teacher showing me the way." Buddha is above all a teacher. That is important. Buddha is not a god. Buddha is not the creator-god. Buddha is a human being like us. But because in that person there is the essence of wisdom, of compassion, of great action, of great vow, that person is worthy to be our teacher, and therefore we have to call Buddha "teacher". Buddha is not a god to give us happiness, not a god that we can offer flowers to. Buddha is the person who shows us the way, so we don't fall into the abyss of making mistakes. In Chinese it's dao Su, path teacher. The top character means "the way", and on the bottom is the character for "hand", and together they mean the hand that shows us the way or "guide". So when you talk about somebody as our teacher showing us the path, he is the one who is wholly awakened, completely enlightened. In Sanskrit awakened is bodhi. Here we see that the basis of our teacher showing us the way is Great Wisdom, full awakening. As far as the outer form is concerned it's something very beautiful, this is talking about the body of the Buddha. And as far as the mind is concerned it is fulfilled understanding and compassion. The Vietnamese word for fulfilled means complete and full. So we say he's the completely fulfilled awakened one, the Buddha, great, full, awakened. What is full? What is complete? Compassion and the understanding are fulfilled and complete. So, we have four lines to read about the Buddha. And when we read those four lines we should be able to have an image, a visualization of the Buddha, in terms of energy and not in terms of bronze or wood. And then we can be in touch with that energy. And that is what is called buddhanusmrti, visualization of Buddha, mindfulness of the Buddha.

Dharma is the right path leading people out of the world of ignorance, taking us back to live an awakened life. So now instead of meditating on the Buddha we are meditating on the Dharma, recollecting the Dharma. And finally we have recollection of Sangha.

Once we've been in touch with Buddha we are in touch with Dharma as the bright path which can take us out of the realms of ignorance where we are not awake, where we are dreaming, where we cannot see the truth. And that path can take us back to live a life of awakening. Before that we lived a life of forgetfulness. So the life of awakening is above all the life of mindfulness. We are present, really there in each moment. And at that point we can be in touch with everything, which is happening, deeply. That is called mindful living. When we have mindfulness, quite naturally concentration and understanding follow, and our life must be an awakened one. And that life of awakening isn't something we hope to have tomorrow, it is something, which we have right away, now.

"The Sangha is a beautiful community which goes together on the path of joy." It's a very beautiful image, which helps us to recognize what is the real Sangha. If a Sangha is not beautiful, does not have happiness, it cannot be called a Sangha. This is perhaps the best line in this chant. "Sangha is a beautiful community going together on the path of happiness." We're not going on our own. If we are all going on our own we cannot call it Sangha. Sangha is not a small drop of water. Sangha is a river. Only a river can go to the sea. And we have to be one with the Sangha. We have to take the Sangha as our body. And then we have a Sangha body. "I vow to be a river and not a small drop of water"...you can make the next two verses of this poem, because everybody has a poet in them. "I vow to be a river and not to be a small drop of water..." you have to make the next two lines. "The Sangha is the beautiful community", and the beauty of this community is made of the essence of the precepts, fine manners and harmony. And looking into the precepts, the fine manners and the harmony people have faith. Any place that has precepts, fine manners and harmony, that place has happiness and beauty and that's why we say the Sangha is the beautiful community together taking the joyful path.

When we went to the United States and we called in at Omega Institute there were the beautiful red and yellow leaves of autumn, and we had an opportunity to look at the branches of the maple trees. And they looked so beautiful, because each leaf on the branch stays in its place. In itself each leaf wasn't perfect, they might have been eaten by caterpillars. But they looked very beautiful when you looked at the branch, because each leaf stayed in its place. The beauty of the branch was thanks to each leaf being in its place. A Sangha is the same. Looking into the harmony of the Sangha we see its beauty. That beauty is

in its place. A Sangha is the same. Looking into the harmony of the Sangha we see its beauty. That beauty is made by what is called the Six Harmonies. "The Sangha is the beautiful community going together on the joyful path, practicing liberation and helping peace and joy to come into life." The business of the Sangha is to practice liberation. It's not to build temples or to do social work, but to practice toward liberation, and to train in liberation. That training, that practice has only one aim, that is to undo the knots in the ropes which tie our body and our mind: our anger, craving, ignorance are ropes, jealousy is a rope, etc. and they bind us. We have to be liberated from these things. The aim of our practice is liberation, and this training is to bring us freedom. Who are you practicing liberation for? For yourself. And to help others to liberate themselves. And that will bring you peace and joy, and bring peace and joy into life. Happiness, if you don't have peace you don't have happiness. We have an opportunity to meditate on Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and each of these meditations is four lines long. Later we will have another chant, which is more complete concerning meditation on these three things. I take refuge in the Three Jewels. And if we leave one of these three jewels we will not be able to practice.

"I know the Three Jewels are in my heart." I know that the Three Jewels protect me from outside, but they are also in me. This is the teaching of taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha in oneself. And the matter of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha in our self is what makes the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha around us.

"I vow diligently to enable these Three Jewels to grow brighter in my heart." The Three Jewels are three precious things. "I vow to follow my breathing, to smile the half smile, freshly." Breathing here is conscious breathing. Although we are cooking, washing clothes, doing the gardening, we are following our breathing. Because if we don't follow our breathing we lose the present moment. "I open the half smile freshly." This smile is a sign that I am practicing mindfulness; it is a smile of mindfulness. When somebody practices and smiles, the practitioner should know whether the smile is a worldly smile or whether it is a smile coming from mindfulness, a smile, which recognizes I am going on the path of the right Dharma. I have a lot of happiness, a lot of good fortune because of that. And if we have a smile, which arises from that, that smile can freshen our mind and our body, and also freshen those around us. But there is all sorts of laughter and smiling which we should not take part in. Smiles, which are discriminating smiles, which are full of ignorance, we should not use this kind of smile. We should only use the smile of awakening. And when we can smile like that, people will see clearly that the Sangha is a beautiful community. We are going together on the path of beauty, the path of happiness.

"I vow to learn to look at life with the eyes of deep looking." We have two eyes like other people. But usually when other people look they look superficially. We look deeply, with the eyes of deep looking. And the more we look like that, the more we understand. And the more we understand the more we love. Therefore we say "looking at life with the eyes of love", this is a sentence which we see in the Lotus Sutra. The reason why we can look with the eyes of love is because we know how to look deeply.

"I vow to try and understand the suffering of all beings." The first Dharma talk of the Buddha was about the Four Noble Truths. The first noble truth, which the Buddha talked about, was about the presence of suffering in the world. In the fourth precept of the Tiep Hien Order it says we should not close our eyes before suffering. We have to be present with those who are suffering, accept the presence of suffering, and look deeply into the basis of that suffering. Because looking deeply into the basis of suffering is the only way to see the way out of suffering. "I vow to try to understand the suffering of all species, to practice love, compassion, and to put into action joy and equanimity." Love, compassion, joy and equanimity are the true basis of authentic love. And we will have an opportunity to learn more about these four things later. The more we practice these the more they develop, and the more our happiness increases and the happiness of those around us also increases. "In the morning I will give to someone a feeling of joy, and I want in the afternoon to help someone suffer less." This is something, which is within our grasp, something we can do. We can do it by looking after that person, by a way of looking at them, by something we say; this is a practice. You should not say: "I practice love, compassion, joy and understanding." You have to really practice with those around you. Because there are those around you who do not yet have enough happiness. And so in the morning you can do something to make at least one person more happy, and in the afternoon at least one person suffer less. In the English version we say: "I vow to offer joy to one person in the morning." You use the word "one" which we don't use in the

something to make at least one person more happy, and in the afternoon at least one person suffer less. In the English version we say: "I vow to offer joy to one person in the morning." You use the word "one" which we don't use in the Vietnamese version. Then you can say every day: "Beings are without limit, I vow to save them all", and so you don't help just one person in the morning and one person in the afternoon. In Vietnamese they don't put the word "one", although it could mean one person. It means at least one in the morning and at least one in the evening.

"I vow to live a simple life", that means a life of few desires. This is the principle of our daily life. Because in consumer society we think that happiness is to have many material things, but in fact on our path the more simply we live the more happiness we will have. To have happiness we need to have few desires. So we have to say to our self: "Now I have enough, there is no need for me to go and acquire more." "I know I've got enough already, I don't have to run out and buy any more." This is the principle for people who are going shopping. "A life, which is healthy." A simple life goes with good health. The more you consume the more you harm your body and mind. How can every moment of our daily life have peace and harmony in it? Harmony in our heart, harmony between us and others, and peace. That leads to our body being strong. We have to practice so that our body is strong too. If we have difficulties with our intestines, we have to be careful what we eat and drink. We have to know how to clean our intestines, that is our practice. And that comes from mindfulness.

"I vow to abandon anxiety, and practice forgiving and tolerance." We have worry and anxieties in our mind, which add kilos of weight to our heart. So we have to abandon these worries. If you can't do it on your own you should ask the help of your teacher, your brothers and your sisters: "Help me to let go of this burden." If we keep carrying these burdens around with us all day long and take them to bed with us when we sleep then it is not good, so we need to brush them off our coat in order to have liberation and we feel light within our self. And when we feel light and free in our self, then our brothers and sisters are grateful to us and gain from us.

I vow to hold deep gratitude". That is I feel I need to help my mother and my father, whether they're alive or they've passed away. I practice so that they can be light and free. They are in us and they are outside of us. And our daily practice is to help us to be light and free, to help mother and father in us also to be light, free and liberated. Whoever constantly practices stability and freedom is always helping their family. Gratitude to my father and mother, gratitude to my teacher, gratitude to my spiritual friends and to all beings. These are the four gratitude's. "I vow to practice diligently so that the tree of compassion and understanding will flower." Every day we have to be diligent, putting all our mind into our practice of liberation and not allowing our mind to worry about other things, things which are not important. The most important thing is the practice of liberation. Diligently means putting all our energy into one direction, the direction of developing liberation.

There is a tree in us, and that tree is a flowering tree, that is our practice. And if we know how to look after that flowering tree it will have many flowers. The flowers of compassion and the flowers of wisdom. And one day there will be the capacity to help all species. We may not yet be Buddha, but in the meantime we can help people. We can help our brothers and sisters, and help the practitioners who come to practice with us. And then we know that in the future we will be able to do the same as Buddha. Because we have begun to do that already today. "I ask the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha to be my witness, to support us, give us more energy, protect us, so that we may wholly realize our great vow." This is the energy of Samantabhadra and Ksitigarbha, the energy of the Great Vow.

Now we go on to Monday Evening. If you've already studied Samantabhadra's Vows it will help you a lot. I know that the New Hamlet has studied it, I don't know about the Upper Hamlet, how much they've studied. In the New Hamlet they've studied twelve sections. The next Dharma talk will be in English, on the 24th, and maybe the next two also. So after we've had two or three Dharma talks in English we will come back again to studying this in Vietnamese.



Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# A Rose for Your Pocket

By Thich Nhat Hanh

The thought "mother" cannot be separated from that of "love". Love is sweet, tender, and delicious. Without love, a child cannot flower an adult cannot mature. Without love, we weaken wither. The day my mother died, I made this entry in my journal: "the greatest misfortune of my life has come!" Even an old person, when he loses his mother, doesn't feel ready. He too has the impression that he is not yet ripe, that he is suddenly alone. He feels as abandoned and unhappy as a young orphan. All songs and poems praising motherhood are beautiful, effortlessly beautiful. Even songwriters and poets without much talent seem to pour their hearts into these works, and when they are recited or sung, the performers also seem deeply moved, unless they have lost their mothers too early even to know what love for mother is. Writings extolling the virtues of motherhood have existed since the beginning of time throughout the world. When I was a child I heard a simple poem about losing your mother, and it is still very important for me. If your mother is still alive, you may feel tenderness for her each time you read this, fearing this distant yet inevitable event. That year, although I was still very young my mother left me, and I realized that I was an orphan, everyone around me was crying, I suffered in silence...Allowing the tears to flows, I felt my pain soften. Evening enveloped Mother's tomb, the pagoda bell rang sweetly. I realized that to lose your mother is to lose the whole universe. We swim in a world of tender love for many years, and, without even knowing it, we are quite happy there. Only after it is too late do we become aware of it. People in the countryside do not understand the complicated language of city people. When people from the city say that mother is "a treasure of love", that is already too complex for them. Country people in Vietnam compare their mothers to the finest varieties of bananas or to honey, sweet rice, or sugar cane. They express their love in these simple and direct ways. For me, a mother is like a "ba hu+o+ng" banana of the highest quality, like the best "ne^p mo^t" sweet rice, the most delicious "mi'a lau" sugar cane! There are moments after a fever when you have a bitter, flat taste in your mouth, and nothing tastes good. Only when your mother comes and tucks you in, gently pulls the covers over your chin, puts her hand on your burning forehead (Is it really a hand, or is it the silk of heaven?), and gently whispers, "My poor darling!" do you feel restored, surrounded with the sweetness of maternal love. Her love is so fragrant, like a banana, like sweet rice, like sugar cane. Father's work is enormous, as huge as a mountain. Mother's devotion is overflowing, like water from a mountain spring. Maternal love is our first taste of love, the origin of all feelings of love. Our mother is the teacher who first teaches us love, the most



important subject in life. Without my mother I could never have known how to love. Thanks to her I can love my neighbors. Thanks to her I can love all living beings. Through her I acquired my first notions of understanding and compassion. Mother is the foundation of all love, and many religious traditions recognize this and pay deep honor to a maternal figure, the Virgin Mary, the goddess Kwan Yin. Hardly an infant has opened her mouth to cry without her mother already running to the cradle. Mother is a gentle and sweet spirit who makes unhappiness and worries disappear. When the word "mother" is uttered, already we feel our hearts overflowing with love. From love, the distance to belief and action is very short. In the West, we celebrate Mother's Day in May. I am from the countryside of Vietnam, and I had never heard of this tradition. One day, I was visiting the Ginza district of Tokyo with the monk Thien An, and we were met outside a bookstore by several Japanese students who were friends of his. One discretely asked him a question, and then took a white carnation from her bag and pinned it on my robe. I was surprised and a little embarrassed. I had no idea what this gesture meant, and I didn't dare ask. I tried to act natural, thinking this must be some local custom. When they were finished talking (I don't speak Japanese), Thien An and I went into the bookstore, and he told me that today was what is called Mother's Day. In Japan, if your mother is still alive, you wear a red flower on your pocket or your lapel, proud that you still have your mother. If she is no longer alive, you wear a white flower. I looked at the white flower on my robe and suddenly I felt so unhappy. I was as much an orphan as any other unhappy orphan; we could no longer proudly wear red flowers in our buttonholes. Those who wear white flowers suffer, and their thoughts cannot avoid returning to their mothers. They cannot forget that she is no longer there. Those who wear red flowers are so happy, knowing their mothers are still alive. They can try to please her before she is gone and it is too late. I find this a beautiful custom. I propose that we do the same thing in Vietnam, and in the West as well. Mother is a boundless source of love, an inexhaustible treasure. But unfortunately, we sometimes forget. A mother is the most beautiful gift life offers us. Those of you who still have your mother near, please don't wait for her death to say, "My God, I have lived beside my mother all these years without ever looking closely at her." Just brief glances, a few words exchanged-asking for a little pocket money or one thing or another. You cuddle up to her to get warm, you sulk, you get angry with her. You only complicate her life, causing her to worry, undermining her health, making her go to sleep late and get up early. Many mothers die young because of their children. Throughout her life we expect her to cook, wash, and clean up after us, while we think only about our grades and our careers. Our mothers no longer have time to look deeply at us, and we are too busy to look closely at her. Only when she is no longer there do we realize that we have never been conscious of having a mother. This evening, when you return from school or work or, if you live far

away, the next time you visit your mother, you may wish to go into her room and, with a calm and silent smile, sit down beside her. Without saying anything, make her stop working. Then, look at her for a long time, look at her deeply. Do this in order to see her, to realize that she is there, she is alive, beside you. Take her hand and ask her one short question to capture her attention, "Mother, do you know something?" She will be a little surprised and will probably smile when she asks you, "What, dear?" Keep looking into her eyes, smiling serenely, and say, "Do you know that I love you?" Ask this question without waiting for an answer. Even if you are thirty or forty years old, or older, ask her as the child of your mother. Your mother and you will be happy, conscious of living in eternal love. Then tomorrow, when she leaves you, you will have no regrets. In Vietnam, on the holiday of Ullambana, we listen to stories and legends about the bodhisattva Maudgalyayana, and about filial love, the work of the father, the devotion of the mother, and the duty of the child. Everyone prays for the longevity of his or her parents, or if they are dead, for their rebirth in the heavenly Pure Land. We believe that a child without filial devotion is just artificial. But filial devotion also arises from love itself. Without love, filial devotion is just artificial. When love is present, that is enough, and there is no need to talk of obligation. To love your mother is enough. It is not a duty; it is completely natural, like drinking when you are thirsty. Every child must have a mother and it is totally natural to love her. The mother loves her child, and the child loves his mother. The child needs his mother, and the mother needs her child. If the mother doesn't need her child, or the child his mother, then this is not a mother, and this is not a child. It is a misuse of the words "mother" and "child". When I was young, one of my teachers asked me, "What do you have to do when you love your mother?" I told him, "I must obey her, help her, take care of her when she is old, and pray for her, keeping the ancestral altar when she has disappeared forever behind the mountain." Now I know that the word "What" in his question was superfluous. If you love your mother, you don't have to do anything. You love her; that is enough. To love your mother is not a question of morality or virtue. Please do not think I have written this to give a lesson in morality. Loving your mother is a question of profit. A mother is like a spring of pure water, like the very finest sugar cane or honey, the best quality sweet rice. If you do not know how to profit from this, it is unfortunate for you. I simply want to bring this to your attention, to help you avoid one day complaining that there is nothing left in life for you. If a gift such as the presence of your own mother doesn't satisfy you, even if you are president of a large corporation or king of the universe, you probably will not be satisfied. I know that the Creator is not happy, for the Creator arises spontaneously and does not have the good fortune to have a mother. I would like to tell a story. Please don't think that I am thoughtless. It could have been that my sister didn't marry, and I didn't become a monk. In any case, we both left our mother -- one to lead a new life beside the man she loved,

and the other to follow an ideal of life that he adored. The night my sister married, my mother worried about a thousand and one things, and didn't even seem sad. But when we sat down at the table for some light refreshments, while waiting for our in-laws to come for my sister, I saw that my mother hadn't eaten a bite. She said, "For eighteen years she has eaten with us and today is her last meal here before going to another family's home to take her meals." My sister cried, her head bowing barely above her plate, and she said, "Mama, I won't get married." But she married nonetheless. As for me, I left my mother to become a monk. To congratulate those who are firmly resolved to leave their families to become monks, one says that they are following the way of understanding, but I am not proud of it. I love my mother, but I also have an ideal, and to serve it I had to leave her -- so much the worse for me. In life, it is often necessary to make difficult choices. We cannot catch two fish at the same time: one in each hand. It is difficult, because if we accept growing up, we must accept suffering. I don't regret leaving my mother to become a monk, but I am sorry I had to make such a choice. I didn't have the chance to profit fully from this precious treasure. Each night I pray for my mother, but it is no longer possible for me to savor the excellent "ba hu+o+ng" banana, the best quality "ne^p mo^.t" sweet rice, and the delicious "mi'a lau" sugar cane. Please don't think that I am suggesting that you not follow your career and remain home at your mother's side. I have already said I do not want to give advice or lessons in continuing to look into her eyes with a serene smile, tell her, "Do you know that I love you?" Ask her this question without waiting for an answer. Even if you are thirty, forty years old, or older, ask her simply, because you are the child of your mother. Your mother and you will both be happy, conscious of living in eternal love. And tomorrow when she leaves you, you will not have any regrets. This is the refrain I give you to sing today. Brothers and sisters, please chant it, please sing it, so that you won't live in indifference or forgetfulness. This red rose, I have already placed it on your lapel. Please be happy.

# Thich Nhat Hanh

(1962)

# All in one, One in All

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Good morning, my dear friends, today is the 11th of August 1997, and we are in the upper hamlet of Plum Village. I guess that everyone here has seen the lotus pond in the lower hamlet. Yesterday I conducted a walking meditation to the lotus pond, and then we went to the plum trees. It was very nice. We enjoyed the lotus and we also enjoyed the plum trees. Many of you were not there. But it looked like Paradise, it was Paradise, and it still is available. Later, you will realize that the lotus pond is not only in the lower hamlet, but in your heart. When you go home to your town and to your house, and every time you sit down quietly and you focus your attention on the lotus pond and the lotus pond will be born again from within you.

Our mind has all kinds of seeds in it. You have a seed of the lotus pond within you. Every time you use your mindfulness and you touch the seed of the lotus pond in you, you can see the lotus pond with all these flowers and big leaves like this. You don't have to go to the lower hamlet to really have the lotus pond. You may ask the question "Where has the lotus pond come from?" I will tell you.

Today I have my pebble bag, but instead of having six pebbles, I have something else in it. My bag is full of lotus seeds. And all the lotuses in the lower hamlet came from a tiny seed like this. We just begin with one seed. Can you look into this seed and see the whole lotus pond and hundreds of lotus flowers and lotus leaves? Can you imagine that all the lotuses and all the leaves of the lotuses come from this tiny little seed? Yet this is true. I'll tell you how to make this lotus seed into a lotus pond. It's easy. Please listen, because I'm going to offer each of you one lotus seed, so that when you go home, you'll be able to make a lotus pond.

You know that a lotus seed has to be planted in mud with water because it does not grow well in dry soil. You think that this seed can be just put into the mud and you can wait until it sprouts, but it will not sprout if you just put it in the mud, because the lotus seed is made of a kernel inside and also a very hard skin outside. Even if you leave the lotus seed three weeks or five weeks or ten weeks within the mud, it will not sprout, even if the mud is full of water. I know that

there are lotuses that remain alive for more than one thousand years, and after one thousand years we plant it, it can still grow into a lotus plant.

So you should know how to help the lotus seed to sprout. This is the secret: you have to help the water to penetrate into the lotus seed. You may use a little knife, a little saw, and you cut just a little bit, about half a millimeter, so that the water has a chance to penetrate into the lotus and about four or five days later, the lotus seed will sprout and become a tiny lotus plant. If you hold a lotus seed like this and you rap it against a rock for one minute, this part of the skin of the lotus will be removed, so that that spot of the lotus skin will allow the water to get in, and five days after, it will sprout. You will see very tiny lotus leaves and the lotus leaves can get as big as this cup. You keep it in your yard if it is in the spring or summer or autumn, but when it is cold, you bring it into your house. It will continue to grow, and when spring comes you can bring it out, and you can change the container into a bigger one, and the lotus plant will become bigger and bigger. In one year you will begin to have a few lotus flowers, and in three years you will have a lotus pond as big as the one in the lower hamlet, and if you want it can be ten times bigger. Do you think that you can do it? You can make a lotus pond as big as this.

I will offer each child in this assembly one lotus seed, and I trust that you will keep it well and bring it home to make that experiment. You will learn that a huge lotus pond is contained within this. Ancestors of the lotus have transmitted all the talents, all the fragrance, all the beauties in this tiny seed, and if this seed knows how to practice, it will manifest all this talent, all these beauties, all these wonders from within it, and offer themselves to the world.

Each of you is a seed, a wonderful seed like a seed of lotus. You look a little bit bigger than a lotus seed, but you are a wonderful seed. In you there are a lot of talents. Compassion is in you. Understanding is in you. Love is in you. The capacity to smile is in you, the capacity to help other people be happy is in you. Because these wonderful virtues, these wonderful qualities, have been transmitted to you by your ancestors, your blood ancestors and your spiritual ancestors. If you know how to sprout and to grow, you will be a very beautiful lotus pond and you will offer a lot of happiness to many, many people around you, not only people, but animals, plants and minerals. A tiny lotus seed can make so many people happy. It has made me happy. A television man from Paris came to Plum Village and he saw some lotus flowers, and he reported on French television that lotus flowers bloom like mushrooms in Plum Village.

We have so many kinds of wonderful seeds within us, and if we know how to help the seeds to sprout, we'll be very happy and we'll be able to offer a lot of

happiness to so many people. We already have a lot of good seeds in us, and we continue to receive seeds. When I look at you with loving eyes, and with the eyes of trust and admiration, a good seed is planted in you. I help plant a seed of faith, of confidence, of compassion in you, just by looking at you with the eyes of love and compassion. And we can help each other by planting the positive and beautiful seeds in each other. Every sound you hear can be a seed, a good seed or a negative seed. Every sight you see can be received as a seed in yourself, a positive seed or a negative seed. That is why in Plum Village we try our best to maintain a place where you can only see positive sights and positive sounds. In fact, Plum Village is a sanctuary of the Five Mindfulness Trainings. We come together here and try to protect the environment so that we will not see things that are not the dharma. We will not hear anything that is not the dharma. Everything translates the Five Mindfulness Trainings, and that is why while you are in Plum Village you are safe. Every sight, every sound, every face, every touch should contain the dharma in it, and you are protected by the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

I know in America, in Europe, there are national parks where animals are protected. There are sanctuaries for animals, and you are not allowed to go in and shoot a deer or a rabbit. They are safe. So Plum Village is a kind of sanctuary like that where the Five Mindfulness Trainings are protected. If anyone shoots one of these precepts down, we have to tell him, to ask him, to leave, because we don't want the precepts shot down in our territory. We can do that only with the collaboration of everyone. The Five Mindfulness Trainings practiced by the whole Sangha will transform this place into a sanctuary where everyone is safe. There is no sound, there is no sight, there is no touch that can create negative seeds in us. If we train ourselves well in Plum Village, we will go home and transform our home into a sanctuary also.

We use our television, we use our telephone, we use our kitchen in such a way that the mindfulness trainings can be kept alive all the time and we do that for the world, we do that for our family, we do that for ourselves. This is the teaching. So the lotus seed is here, in my two fingers, but it is there, in your heart, and you yourself are a wonderful seed and you should take care of yourself and we should be able to help you take care of yourself, so that one day you may sprout into a wonderful lotus pond, and you will make happiness for so many people. I think I have here enough lotus seed for each young person. Will you come each of you and receive one lotus seed? Maybe you would like to keep it in your pebble meditation bag. I will ask only two persons to come and I will ask Sister Gina to take care of distributing to each one of you one seed. OK. A young gentleman and a young lady?

Please breathe in and breathe out.

[Pause for one minute while distributing seeds.]

[To the young people:] When you hear the small bell, stand up and bow to the Sangha before you go out.

[Bell]

We have the habit of seeing things not inside of each other, but in Buddhist meditation we are advised to learn how to look at things, so that we can see things within each other. Usually we think that the lotus pond is outside of the lotus seed, and the lotus seed is outside of the lotus pond. But in fact, if we practice looking deeply, you realize that the lotus seed is in the lotus pond, but at the same time the lotus pond is in the lotus seed. When you look at your daddy, you may think that your daddy is outside you and you are outside your daddy. But if you look more closely, you will see that your daddy is not really outside. He is inside you, and you are inside your daddy.

When we were small, in the womb of our mother, there was a link between us and our mother called the umbilical cord. We were attached to our mother. We were a kind of one with our mother. Our mother breathed for us, ate for us, worried for us, drank for us, and smoked for us. [Laughter] So everything our mother did, we did because we were really one with our mother. When we were born, when we got out, they cut the umbilical cord and slowly we had the idea that our mother was different from us. But in fact, we continued to have that very close link with our mother. If our mother was not here, how could I be? So the umbilical cord, although you don't see it, still is there and we have to learn to look at the umbilical cord that is always there within us and our mother, and our grandmother, our grandfather, our ancestors.

You can touch it now. Since you are there, they are there, and they are not somewhere else. They are within you and you can touch them, because this hand is your hand, but of course it is also the hand of your mother. Remember when you had a fever as a child, you did not want to eat anything, drink anything, you suffered. And suddenly your mother came and put a hand on your forehead. You felt so good, and sometimes you wish that you still had that hand, that wonderful hand with you available at any time you suffer. But in fact, that hand is still available, because this is her hand. If you just breathe in and out and realize that this is also her hand, because your hand is a continuation of your

mother's hand. You breathe in and you put it on your forehead, and then you have it again available. So the umbilical cord is always there, as ever.

And if you look more closely you will see that between you and a cloud floating in the sky there is also an umbilical cord, because without the cloud floating in the sky you would have no water in your body. And if you look at the sun, there is an umbilical cord linking you with the sun, because without the sun there would be light, no heat, no warmth, and no food, no washed vegetables. You can see that the sun is a kind of father, a kind of mother.

Driving through the countryside of France in the summer, I look at the cows, I look at the hay, I look at the nice fields. I feel closely connected. I see the hay as the milk, the yogurt I eat in the morning, also the cornfield. I see the link between everything. The cow is a mother to me. You drink the milk from the cow, you have an umbilical cord between you and the cow, and the sunflower and the hay. To meditate means to train yourself to look in such a way, to see the nature of interconnectedness of everything. One day you will see that the idea of outside and inside are just ideas. Everything is inside. The one is the many. The British nuclear physicist David Bohm said that it seems that there are two kinds of order, the explicate order and the implicate order. These are two words invented by him. In the explicate order, everything seems to exist outside of everything else, like a flower is outside of the table, the flower is outside of the earth, is outside of the wind, of the cloud. Flower is not cloud, flower is not earth, flower is only flower. That is the way we used to look at things, and that world is called the explicate order. But if you look more deeply, you enter into the implicate order, where everything is in everything else.

In the teaching of the Buddha there are also two terms that are equivalent: *lokadhatu* and *Dharmadhatu*. *Lokadhatu* is the world and *Dharmadhatu* is also the world, but in *lokadhatu* it seems that everything is outside of everything else. You are not I and I am not you. You are not your father; your father is not you. But if you live deeply and you touch deeply, you will touch the *Dharmadhatu* where everything is in everything else.

The Buddha's teachings on the interconnectedness of everything, of the nature of inter-being of everything, are found in a very beautiful way in a sutra called the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. The *Avatamsaka Sutra* is like a giant poem because it speaks in terms of image only. If you like poetry, you can enjoy the *Avatamsaka Sutra* and you can understand the *Avatamsaka Sutra* very easily. In the *Avatamsaka Sutra* you are invited to visit the *Dharmadhatu*, the land of bliss, the land of no sorrow. If you don't mind being yourself, body and mind together, and making only one step you can enter in the *Dharmadhatu*, the kingdom of God. In the



Dharmadhatu there is a lot of light. That is why you can see things much more clearly. We need light in order for us not to be blinded by ignorance. Every being in the Avatamsaka world, in the Dharmadhatu world, emits light from his or her body. When you enter that realm of bliss, you meet all kinds of people, animals, plants, and minerals, just like in this world. Imagine there are also businessmen, there are policemen, there are carpenters, there are teachers, there are students, there are little ones, there are old ones. We have every type of person in the Avatamsaka world, and each one of them emits light, the light of mindfulness. When they walk, when they sit, when they smile, they emit light, and you risk being struck by one beam emitted from them. And if you are struck by one light, you become mindful, and in turn you begin to emit light yourself. At first you step in and you are not very solid yet because you are not used to the Dharmadhatu realm. But as you make three, four, five steps, you are struck by so many beams coming from everyone else, because when they walk, when they sit, when they smile, when they do things, they emit light, the light of mindfulness, and if you are struck by one beam of mindfulness, you yourself become mindful, and very soon you will emit light from your body. This you can do.

Think of Plum Village. When you step into Plum Village, you see everyone walking mindfully, sitting mindfully, speaking mindfully, and by doing so they emit the light of mindfulness. You realize that they are mindful and the beams of mindfulness strike you, and suddenly you become mindful, you stop running, and there you are walking mindfully, and in your turn you send out beams that will strike other people who just come and they become mindful themselves. That is why it is described in the Avatamsaka Sutra that in the Dharmadhatu world there is a lot of light. Not only Buddhas, bodhisattvas, great beings emit light from their body, from their consciousness, but everyone, including the policeman, including the schoolteacher, including the carpenter, including the mason, including the farmer, and yourself.

The Avatamsaka world is available in the here and the now. There is so much light. Light is available, you can profit from the light. You yourself produce light to help the Avatamsaka realm to be more beautiful. In the Avatamsaka realm there is a lot of space. Space inside of you and space outside of you. Because when you enter the Avatamsaka realm you lay down all your worries, your projects in the future, you know how to dwell in the present moment and enjoy the light, enjoy the space that is offered by the realm.

So much space, so much freedom. Freedom from worries, freedom from projects, freedom from the past, freedom from the futures, freedom even from the idea of how to be happy. There is so much space in the Avatamsaka realm. Everyone is free. Even the carpenter. He is not in a hurry. He does his job in a very relaxing

way, singing. Building a house is a matter of a lifetime. After you build one house, you have to build another one. Why do you have to hurry? So carpenters are building houses in the most beautiful way possible. The houses are beautiful also, because they have been built in mindfulness, in concentration.

In the Avatamsaka realm, the cook, she cooks mindfully. She enjoys cooking, she enjoys washing the dishes. Every minute of the work brings her peace and joy. She does not need to run, to wish that the work would be over for her to be free. Her freedom is available while she is cooking. She is singing. She is looking at everyone else with the eyes of compassion. And she is emitting light, the light of freedom, the light of happiness, the light of mindfulness. She is happy because there is a lot of space within her. She has space to love. To embrace, because in her, blocks of worries, blocks of anxieties, blocks of fears have been let down. Because the light that has struck has helped her to lay down all this kind of luggage that is not very useful for her life or for her happiness. Look around her. A lot of space. No matter where she finds herself there is space. Hills, rivers, mountains, low lands, high lands are for her she can enjoy every place. She feels like the moon traveling in empty sky. There is so much space around her.

The people who love her never want to lock her into a prison. Even the prison called love. The people who love her, the people around her allow her to be herself. And she allows people around her to be themselves, that is why all of them have space inside. And space outside. By loving each other, they offer each other space. They don't practice what we practice in the Lokadahtu: possessive love.

In the Avatamsaka world there is a lot of time. You never run out of time. Time is for being alive. Time is not for other things. We know how to use time, we know how to enjoy time. Because time is light itself. Time over there is not money. Time is life. And there is no deadline. And because there is no deadline there is no stress. Freedom is what we have in the Avatamsaka world. Freedom is available. In the Avatamsaka world there are a lot of flowers. Looking at everything, we recognize it as a flower. Your hand is a flower. I remember saying, "Quiesce Que c'est Que l'automne? L'automne est une saison ou chaque feuille est une fleur (What is Autumn? Autumn is a season in which each leaf is a flower.) But in the Avatamsaka you don't have to wait till Autumn to see each leaf as a flower. You can see it as a flower in Spring. And what is wonderful is that a new flower contains all the flowers in it.

In the Avatamsaka there are a lot of lion seats where you can sit and you can feel like a lion, the king of the jungle. You feel like you are the king of yourself, the king of the Universe, you are not a slave, you are powerful, you have sovereignty

over yourself. Every seat where you seat becomes a lion seat. The foot of the bodhi tree. You don't have to travel to the foot of the bodhi tree. Every time you seat in mindfulness, that seat becomes the foot of the bodhi tree. And when you are in the Avatamsaka you know that the Buddha is available.

Where is Shakyamuni? You want to go there and pay a visit. In the Avatamsaka everything is in everything else. India is in Japan, Japan in America. You don't have to move. It's wonderful. You need to be yourself, mindful, and you can touch your root teacher anytime. You don't have to travel.

Suppose we hear the New York Times announcing that the Buddha will be available for a walking meditation at the foot of the Gridhrakuta Mountain in India next month. And whoever wants to sign up for a walking meditation with Shakyamuni is requested to do so because very soon there will not be any place on the airplanes. You love your teacher so much and you want to be with him and walking up and down the Gridhrakuta Mountain. You pick up your telephone and make a reservation on the plane so that you can arrive a few days earlier, you want to be sure. When you arrive you may get worried, there are so many people, thousands and thousands of people are flocking into the area, and you don't think that you are strong enough to push, push, push, and get close to the Buddha. Very frustrating! Your deepest wish is that you can get close to him, one meter, or if possible, a little bit closer, and someone can take a picture of you with the Buddha. So that when you go home, you can show people, "You see, I was with the Buddha." But in spite of all these efforts, you are not sure to be able to meet the Buddha and to have a walking meditation with the Buddha.

But in the Avatamsaka world you don't have to buy any ticket, you don't have to make any reservation. You just practice mindful breathing in and out. And when you look you see the Gridhrakuta Mountain is right there, and the Buddha is right there and you just take his hand and you just walk and enjoy it. You don't even need to take a picture with him, because you are him, you are in him, and he is in you. Why do you need a picture of yourself?

In Plum Village I always see that it is beautiful. And if I can be completely satisfied walking here, I don't need to go the Gridhrakuta Mountain. The Buddha is here, available anytime. I don't complain that the Buddha lived two thousand six hundred years ago. No, I don't complain. Because I can touch him, to take his hand, and to practice walking meditation anytime. I don't have the need to take a camera, to make a reservation, to push, to come closer to the Buddha. And I am confident that you who have received the teaching can do the same, stay where you are and be happy.

We need only to be ourselves and to look a little bit deeply, and we are in the Avatamsaka realm. We see ourselves in each other, we see the past, the future, are in the present, and the present is in the past and the future. We become unlimited. Birth and death will not be able to bother us anymore. Because we have unlimited space, unlimited time. We transcend all kinds of borders. We are one with everything else.

In the Avatamsaka world, we'll meet a young person whose name is Sudhana. Sudhana is the disciple of a very illustrious teacher, the Bodhisattva Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of great understanding. Sudhana is about thirteen or fourteen. He has practiced with his teacher, and his teacher taught him how to practice walking, sitting, and chanting. But his teacher is not a closed teacher. He said maybe my young disciple can learn with other teachers as well. So he urged his young student to go out and learn with other teachers. He does not say you are forbidden to study with another teacher. So there is Sudhana going out by himself and learned from many teachers. He got to know fifty-three teachers and learned a lot from all. Among these teachers, there are children, there are non-Buddhists, there are women, there are men, there are old people, there are young people. All kinds of teachers. He does not mind learning from anyone.

One day Sudhana met Mr. Love. His name is Maitreya, the future Buddha, who is supposed to be with us now, by this time, to continue the work of Shakyamuni Buddha. Maitreya Buddha is supposed to be here with us, right now. *Maitri* means love, and Maitreya means Mr. Love. Maybe he is already here, but you don't recognize her. Because you have an idea of how a Buddha would look. Remove that idea, and you will meet Maitreya, Mr. Love, right here and right now. This teacher is always smiling, and so nice, so kind, so compassionate, so loving, that he takes the hand of Sudhana for a long walk, enjoying everything in the Avatamsaka world. And they come to a tower, a stupa, that is locked and Mr. Love says: "Dear young man, there are a lot of wonderful things within this tower. Would you like to go in and visit?" And Sudhana says, "Yes, why not?" Sudhana is very eager of learning, of seeing things, is very open. And you know, Sudhana is in yourself. And how to open the door of the Vairochana Tower? Vairochana is the name of the tower. Vairochana means the Buddha of the living Dharma.

Standing in front of the door, Mr. love practices breathing in and out, and knocks on the door, opens it, and sees that it is immense inside. A lot of space, only space. Suddenly there is no limit anymore, there is endless space, and inside there are trees, there are rivers, there are mountains, there are moons, there are galaxies. The Vairochana tower contains everything, and they enjoy visiting the mountains, rivers and galaxies in the Vairochana tower. Then they come to

another tower, which is called Vairochana tower number two. And Mr. Love says, "Young man, do you want to go in and visit?" And he says why not? So they come to the tower, the door opens and there is endless space, endless time, countless galaxies, rivers and mountains, exactly like the first tower. And of course you know that inside there is another Vairochana tower, Vairochana tower number three. Look at this flower. It is like that. There is a flower within, and within that flower, there is another flower. Sudhana was so happy practicing with that teacher called Mr. Love.

Later, when they said good-bye, he met with another teacher who told him this: "You have to meet the mother of the Buddha because she is a wonderful teacher. Her name is Lady Mahamaya." "How can I meet her? Where should I go to have a chance to meet her?" And that teacher said, "You don't have to go anywhere, you just stay there, and if you know how to practice touching the earth, you'll see her."

You know, in Plum Village, we offer the practice of touching the earth. You come back to yourself entirely. You surrender yourself. You surrender your separate self. You become one with earth. And you use 100 per cent of yourself to touch the earth. And practicing like that seven days, suddenly Sudhana saw a huge lotus flower springing up from the earth. A lotus flower with one thousand petals. Right there in front of him. Suddenly he saw himself sitting on one of the petals of the lotus flower. It was wonderful. In no time at all, that petal of the lotus was transformed into a full lotus with one thousand petals. In one of the petals is the whole flower, with many petals, and in each petal of that second flower, there is also a whole flower. It is like the Vairochana palace. The lotus seed that I just offered to the child is like that. You can see in it the lotus pond, and in the lotus pond there is another seed, and if you look into the lotus, you will see another lotus pond, to infinity. That is not something abstract. You yourself are a lotus seed. You contain all the cosmos, all the ancestors, all generations of children and grandchildren. Take good care of yourself. Touch yourself deeply.

Sudhana saw himself sitting on a full lotus with one thousand petals, and he just looked up and he saw Lady Mahamaya sitting on another lotus, looking down at him, smiling with compassion and love. Sudhana bowed to her, "Lady, honorable lady, I had been looking for you." There is a conversation between the two persons recorded in a chapter of the Avatamsaka Sutra called "Entering the Inconceivable Realm." There is an English translation of the Avatamsaka available.

The conversation goes like this:

"Do you know something, young man? When I conceived Shidatta I was so happy. When Shidatta entered my womb, I was the happiest lady on earth. I felt that I had no more desire. I had a Buddha within me; what else do I want? I didn't have any other projects, I didn't have any other desires, and that is why I was so happy." A person without desire is a happy person because she has everything in her, the most valuable things in her. She doesn't have to run and to seek for them anymore.

Young man, do you know something? After Shidatta had gone into my womb, countless bodhisattvas, Buddhas-to-be, came to me, and wanted to go in too, to see whether it was comfortable in there for their friend Shidatta. Countless bodhisattvas were there, and they wanted to get in, and before I could say anything, they all entered into my womb. And you know something, young man? If there were millions more who would have liked to go in, there was still space inside me."

That is the language of the Avatamsaka. The millions of bodhisattvas, if they want to go in and see whether Shidatta is comfortable in there, there is still plenty of space. In the Avatamsaka world there is a lot of space inside as well as outside.

"You know something, young man? I am the mother of all Buddhas in the past, I am the mother of all Buddhas in the present, and I am the mother of all Buddhas in the future. You should know that. You should train yourself to look at me and to see that."

Sudhana learned a lot. Not only did he see that Lady Mahamaya is the mother of all Buddhas, but he looked into himself and he saw that he is the father of all Buddhas of the past, of the future, and of the present moment. And in Avatamsaka, all of us are pregnant with a Buddha inside. Whether you are a gentleman or a lady, you are pregnant with a Buddha inside, and you are happy. You don't try to look for anything else because you know that Buddha-nature is within you. You know that the Kingdom of God is within you. The Kingdom of God, according to the Gospels, is like a grain, a seed, a mustard seed, exactly the same kind of language. The Kingdom of God is contained in a mustard seed. If you know how to do, to take care of the mustard seed, the mustard seed will become a tree, and all the birds in the cosmos can come and take refuge. The Kingdom of God is within you. The Buddha realm, the Avatamsaka realm, is within you. You need only to touch it. All generations of ancestors are within you: blood ancestors and spiritual ancestors. Why do you want to look for the Buddha, for Jesus, somewhere else? God is not the old man in the sky. God is

alive in you. The Kingdom of God is also in you; just touch and make it manifest. We may need a little bit of training, like the children who need to know how to handle the lotus seed in order for the lotus seed to become a lotus pond. You need a little bit of training, that's all.

[Bell]

In the Lotus Sutra it is taught by the Buddha that everyone has the *Buddhata*, Buddha-nature within, and you are a Buddha. There is a baby Buddha waiting in you and you might lead your daily life in such a way to allow the Buddha in you to bloom, like a lotus seed, to become a lotus pond. Before this teaching, many disciples of the Buddha thought that the Buddha was the only one who could be a Buddha. The maximum you could be was a disciple of the Buddha, an arhat, someone who can transform entirely the afflictions and get free from all suffering, but that the Buddha was the only one who could be a Buddha.

According to the Lotus Sutra, everyone is a Buddha to be, and the Buddha is available within, you can touch anytime. A Buddha is not limited in time and in space. You don't have to go anywhere to touch a Buddha. You just stay where you are, and the Buddha is available. The Buddha does not have to undergo birth and death. The Buddha is always alive, the living Buddha within. So don't think that the Buddha was born in Kapilavastu and entered maha-parinirvana in Kushinagara. That is only a manifested body of the Buddha. The true Buddha was not 2600 years ago only: the true Buddha you can touch in the here and the now. And while the Buddha was revealing the true nature of Buddha in everyone, suddenly there was a voice in space, calling "Wonderful, wonderful, Shakyamuni Buddha, you are preaching the Lotus Sutra to your assembly, wonderful, wonderful." And everyone looked up and saw a huge and beautiful stupa in the sky, decorated with all kinds of jewels, seven kinds of jewels. The very beautiful voice came from within the stupa, the tower, in the sky. Everyone was amazed. How could a stupa appear from the empty space like that, with a wonderful voice coming from within, and praising the Buddha Shakyamuni for giving that wonderful teaching about the Buddha nature. They turned toward their root teacher Shakyamuni Buddha, who was sitting on a rock on the Gridhrakuta Mountain in India, asking him with their eyes, and the Buddha smiled and said that is Prabhutaratna Buddha. He is sitting inside a stupa and he has been offering these words of praise for the Lotus Sutra. You know the Prabhutaratna Buddha has made a vow that everywhere in the cosmos, if there is a Buddha offering the teaching of the lotus about the nature of the Buddha he would come in the form of a stupa, and pronounce these words of praise. That is why today, since I am offering that wonderful teaching he is here to acknowledge it, and to praise me for offering you the teaching.

Everyone in the assembly wanted so badly to see the face of the Prabhutaratna Buddha; they look again at their root teacher and said, "how could we open the door of the stupa so that we could see the Prabhutaratna Buddha in person? We want to see him?" That's very human. All of us are like that: we want to see forms, to see the person who is praising our teacher. We love him because we love our teacher; therefore we love the one who is praising our teacher. That's very human.

The Buddha said, "It is not easy, my dear, because unless I can call back all my manifested bodies in the cosmos, I cannot open this door for eternity for you to see Prabhutaratna Buddha. You know something, you think I am the Buddha, I am the only Buddha, your teacher who is sitting here. In fact that is not true. I am everywhere, I am everywhere in the cosmos, and I am doing exactly the same thing as I do here. I have countless manifested bodies existing in every corner of the cosmos, and while I am teaching the Lotus Sutra here, countless manifested bodies of mine are offering at the same time the teaching on the lotus, and to open the door of the stupa, I have to summon, to call back all of my manifested bodies to be able to open this."

And everyone was looking at the Buddha pleading that he call back all his manifested bodies to be able to open the door for them to see with their own eyes the Buddha within. With a lot of compassion the Buddha wanted to do what seemed to be very difficult to do, for the love of his disciples he tried. He sent out a beam from his forehead, and that beam shot all around the cosmos, and suddenly they came. The assembly saw countless Shakyamuni Buddhas, they look like their teacher, they are coming from every direction, and suddenly space is filled with Shakyamuni Buddhas, countless of them. Now they realize that what they have thought to be their teacher is just a very small part of their teacher. Their teacher is not just a person of sixty kilograms sitting on the Gridhrakuta Mountain. The person of their teacher is huge, is the whole cosmos, existing everywhere in the whole cosmos. Now they have removed one idea of Buddha. They now begin to see their teacher in a different way. Their teacher cannot be just touched in time and space; their teacher has the kind of longevity that cannot be measured. Their teacher has the kind of presence that can be felt in every corner of the cosmos.

Then with all these manifested bodies, Shakyamuni made a gesture, and suddenly the door of the stupa opened. But still many people couldn't see it because everyone was sitting on the ground. Only the heavenly beings, great bodhisattvas who stay up in the air, could look and see the Buddha in the stupa. But all of us are still there, grounded to the floor of the Gridhrakuta Mountain



and they could not see, and they again look at their teacher and plead for help. You have to be on the same level in order to see. If you stay where you are you cannot see: you have to go up to the same level to see it. Otherwise, the Buddha will have to bring it down to you, or bring you up to it.

The Buddha is made of a lot of compassion, and that is why Shakyamuni Buddha tried to help. With his magical power he lifted the whole assembly up, and now everyone could see Prabhutaratna Buddha sitting in the tower. Suddenly Prabhutaratna Buddha smiled and made room in his seat, and invited Shakyamuni Buddha to come and sit together with him, and there the two Buddhas sitting together, the Buddha of eternity, and the Buddha of time and space, they were sitting together to show the assembly that there are two levels. The Buddha manifested as a sight, and the Buddha as your true nature, they are one, they are always one. You should not discriminate.

It's a wonderful sutra. It speaks with images. Prabhutaratna Buddha is the Buddha of the cosmos, and Shakyamuni Buddha is the Buddha of time and space, who appeared on earth for us as a teacher. Yet they are one. If you know to look deeply into Shakyamuni Buddha, you will see the Buddha of the cosmos, everywhere at any time, he is not limited to time and space, and therefore you don't have to go to the Gridhrakuta Mountain to meet him. You can stay right here, and he is available, because there are many manifested bodies of Shakyamuni in the world for you to see, to teach, to touch, and to learn from. If you know how to listen, the sound of the wind can be the teaching about the Four Noble Truths. If you know how to listen to the birds, the sound of the birds can be the teaching of the Eightfold Path. If you know how to contemplate the sunflowers, the sunflowers can reveal the Buddha-Land to you. It's right here, it's right now, the Buddha-Land, the Buddha, the Kingdom of God. You have to be alive to touch it, to live it. Don't waste your life running and looking somewhere else. It is right there.

If you know how to look, how to touch deeply, you will become birthless and deathless, because the nature of everything that is, is without birth and without death. You are in everything else, everything else is in you. Birth and death are just notions that scare us, and if you are able to remove the notions, you get the gift of non-fear, and only with non-fear can true happiness be possible.

In the Avatamsaka Sutra you read this gatha: "All things are birth-less. All things have no extinction. You are also like that. If you know how to look at things this way, you can see and touch all Buddhas at any time." That is a four-line gatha in the Avatamsaka Sutra, in fact it is in the chapter on the Suyama Heaven.

There were so many bodhisattvas from the cosmos coming to the Gridhrakuta Mountain to listen to the dharma talk, and many of them offered to stay there to help the Buddha, because they see that the Buddha works very hard. This planet earth has so much suffering, and the Buddha has to take care of all the living beings on this planet earth. Although he has disciples who help him to take care of the people who need help, it does not seem that he has enough assistance to take care of the people. That is why countless bodhisattvas coming from every corner of the cosmos volunteered to stay to help the Buddha. The Buddha smiled and said, "Thank you. We have enough people here to do the work." So he pointed to the ground, and suddenly from the earth sprung up countless bodhisattvas. Everyone was beautiful, everyone was a dharma teacher, dharma teachers of every kind: young, less young, male, female, all of them are wonderful teachers, all of them are beautiful, and all of them bow to the Buddha. They all have been trained by the Buddha to be workers on this planet earth.

Shariputra asked the Buddha, "Dear teacher, you were born just forty or fifty years ago in Kapilavastu. How could you have had time to train so many dharma teachers, so many bodhisattvas to assist you?" The Buddha smiled and said, "Shariputra, you have seen me only in this life span. I am not limited in time. You have not seen me in my totality. You have only seen me as a manifested body. You have to touch the Buddha deeper to see that the longevity of the Buddha is infinite, and the presence of the Buddha is unlimited, and that is why I have been able to train countless bodhisattvas as dharma teachers. That is why I have thanked bodhisattvas coming from every corner of the cosmos, because here they have enough people to order to take care of the planet earth.

Every word, every sentence of the sutras reveal the same kind of truth, inter-being, the here and the now, the nature of connectedness of everything, everything is inside of everything else, the one contains the all, the all contains the one. If you are able to observe, to look deeply, and touch that kind of nature, you will become birth-less and deathless, and you will be able to touch the Buddha at any time you want. Dear friends, we are going to practice walking meditation together this morning. Let's try to step into the Dharmadhatu and become birth-less and deathless. This is possible. Among us there are those who can stay longer in the Dharmadhatu, and every time they hear the sound of the bell, they go back to the Dharmadhatu. Those of us who have not been trained, we continue to stay and suffer in the lokadhatu, suffer because our view of separateness, or our lack of insight of inter-being. That is why the training is for us to break through, to know how to look at things in their inter-being nature, to touch the nature of no birth and no death. Happiness is available if you know how to step into the Dharmadhatu, the Avatamsaka realm. In the Avatamsaka realm, there is a lot of light. Everyone is emitting light. There is a lot of space.

You don't complain there is no space inside and outside. There is unlimited time. You don't complain that time is running out. There are a lot of flowers. Everything you look at can be transformed into a flower that contains all other kinds of flowers. There are a lot of comfortable lion seats. Wherever you sit may become a lion seat. A lion seat is a place where you can find stability, freedom, you don't want to run anymore, and the Avatamsaka realm is available here and now if you know how to step into it.

After the walking meditation, all of us are invited to join in the formal meal. In a three-month retreat, monks and nun used to have a formal meal every day. So we want to show you how we eat a formal meal in mindfulness. There is a little bit of chanting, an offering of the food to all Buddhas in the cosmos, there will be a sharing of the food for other living beings, and we eat in mindfulness so that peace and joy and brotherhood can be there. We inherit, we profit from the mindfulness coming from everyone in the assembly. Everyone is eating in such a way that the Avatamsaka realm is possible in the here and the now, and that is why when we put ourselves in that situation, it may be penetrated by a lot of light and happiness. We have reduced the ritual to the minimum so it will be pleasant for all of us.

Let us practice walking in such a way that with every step we can touch the Avatamsaka realm. I remember six years ago we had a June retreat for 21 days, and after the talk on the Avatamsaka, there was a very beautiful walk. There was some sunshine, the vegetation was beautiful and everyone felt very clearly that they were in it. Everyone was happy, everyone saw everything in a very different way, and I hope this will be possible today with the collective mindfulness and concentration of the Sangha.

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# Be Like the Earth

## The Practice of Forbearance

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Good morning, dear friends.

Today is the twenty-third of July, 1996, and we are in the Upper Hamlet.

Two days ago in a Dharma talk in English, I asked the children to name that room in our modern home where we can have peace, where we can practice peace, where we can restore our peace. About fourteen years ago I called it a "breathing room," but there must be better names for that room. Of course in that room we can practice breathing and restoring ourselves. But I guess that the children can help propose a beautiful name for that room. Those who are new arrivals should be told a little bit about that.

We said that in our home there is a room for everything—like a guest room, a room for eating, a room for playing, a room for sitting and watching television—but we need a room where we can be really at peace. No one can shout at us when we go into that room. When the atmosphere in the family is not light, is difficult to bear, we can always have some place to go to be ourselves. No one can pursue us into that room in order to continue asking questions, or saying things that we don't want to listen to. We may call it the "Embassy of the Buddha," where you can seek asylum. We can call it the "territory of peace," the "Pure Land," the "meditation corner." Please come up with some better name that fits.

When we look at the village, we see there is a church or a temple in the village. That church or temple plays the role of spiritual leadership. It used to be a higher building than the other houses, and it was surrounded with trees and so on. And we used to think of it with love, with peace, because we knew that when we went there, we could be rid of the annoying things of everyday life. But somehow the church or the temple has lost the role of leadership. Many of us don't feel comfortable anymore when we think of the church or of the temple. Whose fault is that? We should not blame anyone in particular. We are co-responsible for that. A church not playing well the role of a church, a temple not playing well the role of a temple that is our responsibility. We have to restore the spiritual leadership of a church, of the temple. But do we have the right and the power to do so? We are not the church people. We are not the temple people. Can we decide how to rearrange the church and the temple so that it will fit our spiritual need? Because in our daily life we need peace, we need harmony, we need quiet, we need communion—but they no longer provide us with that. Of course, we may have the right to speak out, that we need this and that.

But in our home of the twenty-first century—we still have four years to prepare for our modern home. At least we have that room in our home to play the role of leadership. We talked about the furniture in that room, we talked about a few cushions, we talked about a little table with a little flower pot, we talked about a little bell so that we can practice breathing and calming ourselves. To me, a civilized home should have such a room. It is the heart of our home. Everyone in the family has to sign an agreement, a treaty, that the space of the room should not be violated by anyone, including the father, the mother. Once you enter the room there is no right to shout, there is no

right to have rough words or gestures, because that is the territory of mindfulness, that is the territory of peace, and everyone has to show his or her reverence, respect. Because if we lose that respect and reverence, then there is nothing left. So please help find a name that fits that room. It will play the role of the church and the temple in our home. We will learn how to maintain that room, how to arrange that room, how to practice in that room, so that peace and harmony in our new home become something real—for the sake of all of us. The children already have discussed this, and I ask you to continue it today.

We also discussed the green space so that many houses in the area can profit—a kind of garden, a kind of Buddha garden. You might like to call it a Sangha garden. Because the central park is too big—the central park is for the whole city. We are talking about a little park, for a group of houses only. Because if each house has got to have a room that represents the territory of peace, then the hamlet—a group of houses, like fifteen, twenty, or thirty houses—should possess a space, green, natural, where the harmony of nature should be respected. I propose that in that mini-park there is a playground for children, a space where children can jump and run. Because we do need it, and it is a pleasure for people like me to sit and watch the children running and shouting and playing. We need that very much.

And then there should be a path for walking meditation. Every home needs to have such a path. When you are engaged on the path of walking meditation, you have the right to walk slowly, and in silence. A group of houses should make a kind of agreement on how to maintain and use that little communal park. I cannot survive without the path of walking meditation, I am so used to it. It's like food. If I have no time, no chance, no place to practice walking every day, I don't feel completely happy. I can be happy, but my happiness is not perfect. The walking has become part of my daily life. Every time I have five or ten minutes, I like to use it for walking meditation. Each step brings me a lot of joy. During the walk I pay attention to nature, to every creature that is there—a butterfly, a snail, a little flower, a dry ripe leaf. I don't want to call it a dead leaf. I like to call it a "ripe" leaf.

And I like to see mother taking the hand of daughter, practicing walking meditation, teaching daughter to breathe in and out, to calm her emotions. I would like to see father taking the hand of son, walking meditation. I would like to see them sitting on the grass together, practicing looking at the blue sky, smiling. We don't need to be riding in a motorcar very quickly in order to enjoy life. We can just sit. I guess riding in a motor car is fine, but you might disturb people if the sound of the motor car is too big. And you risk polluting the air and you may reduce the happiness of other people, because you make the quality of the air poorer. So we have to be mindful. In that space of nature, of harmony, we should delegate members of the community who know how to maintain the harmony and the beauty of the little park, for the pleasure of everyone. We should make our walking meditation path beautiful, available to everyone. I hope there are several paths for walking meditation because I do wish that every house, every family, will at least have the opportunity to practice walking meditation every day.

After having worked for one hour, one hour and a half—whether manual work or intellectual work—I always like and need walking meditation outdoors. Yesterday, I had one article to edit. I like editing an article—I like words, I like grammar, I like ideas, I like images, I like poetry—yes. But after about one hour of being together with a pencil (I still don't use a computer yet) and the sheet of paper, I looked up through the window and I saw that young palm tree, so beautiful it looks like it just came out fresh from paradise. It's so appealing that I said, "Although I like editing, the nature outside is so inviting." So my heart vibrated with happiness—I saw that the Pure Land, that paradise, is available. I was like a child. I wanted to come and touch the palm tree.

I have to tell you a little bit of the story of that palm tree: I was in Germany and practicing cleaning my intestines together with other friends. I was fasting several days, just drinking herb tea. One night I saw myself practicing walking in a beautiful park. I was made very mindful during the dream. I touched the bark of the trees mindfully, and enjoyed every detail of the bark of the trees. At one point, I was walking along a path where the vegetation is very green, very young palm trees of this height on my left, and I stopped, and I looked, and I said, "This green is so beautiful, so deep," and I was using my finger and touching it, mindfully. You know something? Mindfulness is possible in dreams. If you practice mindfulness, if you continue, there will be a time when you also practice mindfulness in dreams. And you enjoy it.

I remember a Zen master in China one day brought a number of visitors to visit the garden of the temple and he pointed to a bush, and he told his visitors, "Ladies and gentlemen: people of our time, when they look at these leaves and flowers, they look at them as if they are in a dream." When I practice walking meditation, especially in the woods, I practice touching and looking at the vegetation in such a way that these things cannot be in a dream, should not, could not, be in a dream. And I have succeeded. That even in a dream, the bark of the tree, the palm

tree, have become real also. So when I woke up I said, "The young palm tree in my dream is so beautiful." I told myself that when I go back to France I would like to plant a palm tree, plant it in my garden. Three days after I return to France, I went to the nursery and I found a very beautiful young palm tree, so I asked her to come to my garden.

[Bell]

I planted it in a place where I can see it a lot of times during the day. Every time I stop my work of editing, I look out and I see it. It is part of my Sangha, reminding me to be happy, to enjoy every moment of my daily life. So in that park, in that little park that belongs to the Sangha of new homes—about twenty or thirty homes—we should have a palm tree like that, or any kind of tree that you like to treat the way I treat my palm tree. You should rely on friends in the neighborhood who know how to talk to trees, how to take good care of trees, how to make trees into friends, members of our Sangha, how to arrange a beautiful walking meditation path. And there should be a place where we can sit down—just sit down. We don't need to talk or anything. If you know how to sit down, you'll be happy enough. The other day I talked about Nelson Mandela a week ago in the first Dharma talk of the summer opening. He was visiting France, and he was asked by a reporter what he needed the most. And he said, "The thing I need the most is to sit down. Since the time I got out of prison, I have had no time to sit down." Poor man.

We have come to Plum Village just to sit down. Don't waste your opportunity to sit down. You know how to sit down and not to worry, not to think about doing this or that, to lay down your burdens, your worries, your projects. Just sit down and feel that you are alive—with your son, with your daughter, with your partner, with your Dharma brother or sister. That's enough to be happy. Our sitting in the morning is just for sitting down. Our eating lunch at noon is also for sitting down. The Dharma talk is just an opportunity for us to sit down. So I am happy that the very young people can follow this Dharma talk, because it is very deep.

It is also my desire that in that little communal park, there is also something like a temple or a church, but you don't need to spend a lot of money building it. It must be a place where you can go in and feel protected by the atmosphere and environment. In fact, it is like the breathing room in your home. But now it is not for your family only, it is for twenty or thirty families living in the same area. And because it belongs to different spiritual traditions, that temple, that church, or that meditation hall should not bear any symbol.

There are friends in Florence, in Italy, who propose that they build a temple of peace on a hill of the city. There will be a place without any symbols and people of different spiritual traditions can come and sit together. No liturgy, no chanting, nothing, no statue. But beneath, there may be several halls in where different spiritual traditions can place their symbols—a Buddhist meditation hall, a Catholic praying place, and so on. That is a good idea. But I think in order to build a temple you need a lot of money and I'm not thinking of that. I'm thinking of a beautiful, quiet, simple place where families can come in and sit with other families and offer each other peace, quiet.

Talking about our home in the twenty-first century, we have to be aware of our real need and have to speak out about what we need. We have to talk to our architects, to our government, to our city council for what we need. Imagine a neighborhood where children have no place to go, where people only go to liquor shops and when they go back home, get drunk and shout at each other. There's no communication between families. The black people in that house have no relationship with the white people who live next door. When they meet each other, they don't say hello, there is no relationship at all. The children feel there's no space, no communication. Many children are delinquent, people are not happy with each other in the family and they are not happy with neighbors and you don't feel safe living in such an area. So all these things should be discussed among us who live in the area and we have to rearrange our way of life, as families and as communities.

[Bell]

You may like to discuss this in order to bring our collective insight to organizing our homes in the twenty-first century. During the past week the children have been given teachings on how to breathe, how to practice sitting meditation, practice pebble meditation, and walking meditation.

Another practice we have learned is the practice of calling the names of some people we love. We select, say, five people that we love very much. We know that every time we call his or her name we feel happy, we feel the freshness, we feel the love. That practice is called "mindfulness of calling." For instance you love David. David is

very close to you. You know about David. You know about his quality. You remember his smile. You remember his nice words. You remember his tenderness. So in the sitting position, while you breathe in, you call his name, "David." Mindful calling. You don't have to call it out loud. Just call him in your spirit, "David." Call his name in such a way that he becomes very real to you in that moment. Even if he's not there, if he's in North America, in Japan, yet he becomes very real to you in that moment, just one in-breath. Your success depends on how concentrated you are, how much you are interested in David's presence. That is why I ask you to select first the person you love the most. She may be your mommy, or your brother, or your best friend. And then when you breathe out you smile and you say, "Here I am." So in-breath is for calling him or her—to make him or her be real in the present moment. And during your out-breath you smile to him and you say, "Here I am." You bring yourself back entirely into the present moment—you and he, you and she, are real in the moment. That is the practice of mindfulness of calling.

There are those of us who want to call the Buddha—mindfulness of the calling of the Buddha. Maybe it is a little more difficult to call the Buddha if you are not very familiar with the Buddha. There are ways of practice so that we can see the Buddha in a very real way, as a person. Remember, Buddha is not a god. Buddha is just a human person like us. Every time I call the name of the Buddha, I really touch him, I really see him as someone very close to me. It's like when I call your name. The Buddha appears to me, very real, like yourself, like myself. It's like when I call the name of the full moon. When I look up at the full moon, I know that the full moon is there. And I want only to focus my attention, my whole attention, on the presence of the full moon. So I take an in-breath and I say, "full moon." And then full moon suddenly reveals herself to me very clearly. There's only the full moon at that moment. And when I breathe out, I smile and say, "Thank you for being there." So I and the full moon were very real in that moment. And I repeat, I do it two, three, four times, and my happiness increases all the time. I feel very alive in that moment.

So in your sitting meditation a time may be used just to call a few names in mindfulness. No matter who the person is—the person whose name you call, no matter who he or she is—mindfulness is always mindfulness. You might think that when you call the Buddha your mindfulness is more mindful. That's not true. Even if you call the full moon, mindfulness is true mindfulness. And mindfulness—guess what it is? Mindfulness is the Buddha. You don't need to call the Buddha in order for mindfulness to be the Buddha. Even if you call the snail or the dandelion or the full moon, your mindfulness is still the Buddha. The energy of mindfulness is the energy of the Buddha. So call your mother's name, and the Buddha is there with your mother at the same time. I said mother is a kind of Buddha and Buddha is a kind of mother. Buddha is a kind of moon and moon is a kind of Buddha. It's wonderful! And there is the name of someone that you should try to call sometime later. That person needs you very much and you have very often forgotten her, forgotten him. And that person is yourself. Call your name and smile to him, smile to her. It's very important. You have neglected him, you have been neglecting him a lot. He has suffered quite a lot. You have neglected her very much. She has been suffering, she needs your attention, your mindfulness, your embracing her with mindfulness. You've got to call her name, with compassion, with love.

You are welcome to stand up and to bow to the Sangha before you go out, but today I'm going to tell a very beautiful story in the Dharma talk. If you are interested, you might like to come back.

[Children leave Dharma hall]

Rahula is the son of the Buddha. A few years after enlightenment, the Buddha went back to his hometown, Kapilavastu, and visited his family. He was received by the king, his father, Shuddhodana. He came back with many of his disciples—monks (at that time there were no nuns yet). He gave a beautiful Dharma talk to his father in the palace. The Dharma talk was attended by several informed people in the government, in the royal families, including his former friends. Siddhartha had a lot of friends before he left home and became a monk. Rahula was eight and Rahula was missing his father. That is why when the Buddha went back to his quarters in the vicinity of Kapilavastu with his monks, Rahula wanted to accompany him. Rahula loved the presence, the company of the Buddha, and he didn't want to go home. He wanted to stay in a monastery. One day he said, "Buddha, I want to live with you, I don't want to go home." Buddha said, "Okay." He told his disciple Shariputra to ordain Rahula as a novice. The grandpa was very angry because his son had become a monk, and now his grandson also was made a novice. But little Rahula was so happy living close to the Buddha and he practiced very well with the community of monks. When Rahula was eighteen, the Buddha gave him a very beautiful Dharma talk. I would like to share with you that Dharma talk today. The venerable Shariputra was there, standing behind the Buddha, and he listened to the Dharma talk and he received it very deeply, and he practiced it very deeply, even though the Dharma talk was given to a very young monk—Rahula.



In that Dharma talk, the Buddha advised Rahula to practice being the earth, the great earth. The Buddha said, "Rahula, practice so that you'll be like the earth." People might throw on the earth things like perfume, excrement, urine, all the dirty things, but the earth always receives all of that without anger. No matter whether it is the perfume or jewels or gold or silver or flowers or garbage or dirt or excrement or urine, the earth receives all of that without any resentment, any anger, because the earth is great, is large. The earth has the power to transform all these. You have a dead mouse in your kitchen. You want to get rid of it—where do you put it? You throw it to the earth. In no time at all, the earth transforms the dead mouse into something that you can accept. The earth has a great power of transformation, because the earth is great. So practice so that your heart becomes as great as the earth. You suffer only if you are small, if your heart is small. But when your heart is expanded you don't have to suffer. You don't need to make an effort to bear the suffering.

The other day I started with the image of a water container. It can contain something like fifty liters and if you throw something dirty into that container then you cannot drink that water any more—you have to throw the whole thing away. But if you throw that dirt on a big river, the river is immense, and the river water is still drinkable. In no time at all, the river with all the water and the mud transforms the dirt you throw into it, and everything will be perfect again. And the whole city continues to drink the water from the river. It's not that the river has to bear. We're talking about forbearance, endurance—as a boat to carry you to the other shore—*shanti-paramita*, "crossing to the other shore," the shore of happiness, joy, and liberation by the boat of forbearance.

If you make your heart as large as the earth then you can accept anything people do to you and say to you, without suffering. But if your heart is small, you suffer a lot. So Rahula practiced to be like the earth. That is the practice of love called the Four Immeasurable Minds. Because with the practice, your heart is growing and growing and growing, larger and larger all the time. And your heart will embrace everything, everyone—no enemy at all, there's no enemy. Every time we praise the Buddha, we say, "Dear Buddha, your heart is so big and you embrace every living being with your heart, your compassion encircles the whole of the cosmos." Whether you call them friend or enemy, it's the same when your heart is big, you embrace them all, you love them all—whether they are cruel or less cruel, they are equally the object of your compassion.

So if you are a student of the Buddha try to practice so that your heart grows larger every day, and you won't have to suffer. Even if they say very mean and very cruel things to you, if they do cruel things to you, even if they try to suppress you and to kill you. How can you kill a river? How can you kill the earth? It is so huge. Some dirt cannot destroy the river because the river is so big. "Rahula, practice so that you will be like the water. Whether people throw into the water flowers, fragrance, food, milk, or urine or excrement or dead bodies of animals, the water will receive all without rancor, without resentment, without hatred; because the water has the capacity of washing everything. You can wash the bowl of the Buddha with the water, but you can wash also the dirty cloth, someone full of blood, the water receives everything and the water can wash everything, transform everything. So Rahula, please practice so that your heart will become something like water, you can receive everything without resentment and rancor.

"Rahula, practice like fire. Whether you throw into fire cloth or paper or flowers or dirty things, the fire accepts all and burns all. Whether it is fragrant or whether it stinks the fire accepts all and the fire reduces everything to ash and smoke. Because fire has the power to transform. Rahula, practice being like air. Whether you throw into the air something fragrant or something smelling bad, whether you burn incense or whether you burn rubber, the air accepts all because the air has the power to transform, because air is huge." The Buddha was instructing the young monk Rahula. But Shariputra, the tutor of Rahula, was standing there and absorbing every word of the Buddha and he was practicing that teaching for many, many years.

[Bell]

With the practice of mindful breathing, with the practice of looking deeply, you develop the four elements of your heart. And these four elements of your heart will expand your heart to infinity so that your heart will be like the heart of the Buddha, capable of embracing the whole cosmos. The four elements are *maitri*, which is loving kindness; *karuna*, which in English means "compassion," *Mudita*, which means "joy"—your practice should be joyful, otherwise it's not true practice; and finally, *upeksha*, equanimity—*upeksha* means "no discrimination." You love because the other person needs you, not because he is your countryman or he belongs to the same religion you do. No discrimination at all that is true love.

One day, after finishing his rains retreat, the venerable Shariputra wanted to go north to visit another community

that he had to care for. After he was gone, another monk went to the Buddha and complained about Shariputra: "My Lord, Shariputra is unbearable. He is too arrogant. I hate him. You trust him you love him so much. But he is not worth your love and your trust. He plays too important a role in the Sangha. He teaches so many young monks and he has so much influence in the Sangha and that is not good for you, Lord, and not for him either. You know, my Lord, this morning when he was going out with his bowl I asked him, 'Shariputra, where are you going?' He didn't say anything. He did not even answer me. And with his left hand he pushed me and I fell to the ground, and he did not apologize, he just went out."

You know, Shariputra was the object of a lot of jealousy. Because he was so important a teacher, he was loved and appreciated by the Buddha. Shariputra is there, today, object of jealousy, object of anger, of hatred. I guess in his daily life Shariputra received a lot of things like that but fortunately he practices. The Buddha said, "When did Shariputra leave?" Ānanda said, "Just this morning, my Lord. A few hours ago." "Could anyone go after him and ask him to come back, we would like to see him?" Then a novice was sent by Ānanda to go after Shariputra and to invite him back.

That afternoon Shariputra was back again at the Jeta monastery and the Buddha asked Ānanda to convene a meeting of the Sangha. You can see Ānanda holding a bunch of keys and going to each door and knocking, "Brothers, brother, come to tonight, there will be an important meeting." Then when everyone was there, the Buddha opened his mouth and spoke: "Bhikshu Shariputra, a brother of yours said this morning that when you were leaving the gate of the monastery he asked you where you were going, but you didn't care to answer him and then you pushed him, he fell to the floor, and you just continued your way without apologizing. Is that true?"

This is the answer offered by Shariputra. The answers of Shariputra have been recorded and became a sutra, and the sutra we call *The Lions Roar of Shariputra*. I will read to you a few lines. "Lord, you remember the lesson you gave fourteen years ago to the young Bhikshu Rahula, he was only eighteen years old at the time. You taught him to contemplate the nature of earth, water, fire, and air in order to nourish and develop the four virtues of loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. Although your teaching was directed at Rahula, I learned from it also. I had made efforts to observe that teaching throughout the past fourteen years, and I have often thanked you in my heart.

"Lord, I have tried to practice to be more like earth. Earth is wide and open and has the capacity to receive and transform. Whether people toss pure and fragrant substances such as flowers, perfume, or fresh milk upon the earth, or toss unclean and foul-smelling substances such as excrement, urine, blood, mucous, and spit, on it, the earth receives it all equally with neither grasping nor aversion. Lord, I have contemplated to make my mind and body more like the earth. A monk who does not contemplate the body in the body, who is not mindful of the actions of the body, such a monk could knock down a brother monk and leave him without apologizing. Such is not my way.

"Lord, I have practiced to be more like water. Whether someone pours fragrant substances or defiled substances into water, the water receives them both without grasping or aversion. Water is immense and flowing and has the capacity to transform and to purify. Respected Buddha, I have contemplated to make my body and mind more like water. A monk who does not contemplate the body in the body, who is not mindful of the actions of the body, such a monk could knock down a brother monk and leave him without apologizing. Such is not my way.

"Lord, I have practiced to be more like fire. Fire burns all things, the beautiful as well as the impure, without grasping or aversion. Fire has the ability to burn, purify, and transform. My Lord, I have contemplated to make my body and mind more like fire. A monk who does not practice mindfulness of the body in the body, mindfulness of the actions of the body, such a monk could knock down a brother monk and leave him without apologizing. I am not such a monk.

"Lord, I have practiced to be more like air. The air carries all manner of smells, good and bad, without grasping or aversion. Air has the capacity to transform, purify, and release. Lord, I have contemplated to make my body and mind become more like air. A monk who does not practice mindfulness of the body in the body, who is not mindful of the actions of his body, such a monk could knock down a brother monk and leave him without apologizing. Such is not my way.

"Lord, like a small, Untouchable child, with tattered, torn cloth who clasps a bowl and begs in the street for scraps of food, I practice to hold no false pride or arrogance. I have tried to make my heart like the heart of an Untouchable child's heart. I have tried to practice humility, not daring to place myself higher than others. My Lord,

a monk who does not contemplate the body in the body, who is not mindful of his actions and his speech, such a monk could knock down a fellow monk and leave him without apologizing. I am not a monk like that."

The venerable Shariputra continued speaking like that, but his accuser could bear it no longer. The other monk stood up and took away a piece of his sanghati robe to show his shoulder and bowed to the Buddha and joined his palms and he confessed, "Lord Buddha, I have violated the Precepts. I have born false witness against Shariputra. I confess that I had jealousy, anger, hatred in me. I confess my transgression before you and the entire community. I vow to observe my Precepts better in the future." The Buddha said, "It's good that you have confessed your transgression before the community. We are very glad you have done that." Then Shariputra rose also and he touched the ground in front of the other monk. "I bear no hatred, no anger against my brother and I ask him to forgive anything I may have done to upset him in the past." And both of them practiced Beginning Anew in front of the Buddha. The community saw that Shariputra did really practice in order for his heart to expand like the earth, like the water, like the fire, like the air. No matter what people told him, how mean it was, no matter how cruel were all the things they did to him, he could accept all of that without rancor, without suffering. That is the practice of true love in Buddhism.

True love consisting of loving kindness—the desire to offer happiness; of compassion—the desire to remove the pain from the other person; the desire to practice *Mudita*—joy, to bring joy to people around; and *upeksha*—the desire to accept everything, not to discriminate. You love just because living beings need your love, not because he is your brother or sister, he belongs to your family, or your nation—no discrimination, that is upeksha.

[Bell]

If you still suffer, if you still believe that you are the victim of injustice, if you still think that they have wronged you, it means your heart is still not large enough, you have not become quite like air, or earth, or fire, or water. You still want to undo that injustice, to free yourself from injustice. You want the other person to be punished so that you will feel better because you have been the victim of terrible injustice. Injustice is the thing you see everywhere—a two year old child struck with cancer, a baby just born is already crippled, a couple of young people just married and have an accident that kills both. There are so many things like that happening around you. And you look at the sky and you say, "God is cruel. Where is justice? If God is love, if God is just, how could God allow these things to happen?" After having looked for justice from humankind, expecting the government, expecting the military, expecting the fellow human beings to repair the injustice done to you, and you don't succeed, then you have to look at the sky and you cry out your injustice to God.

Lao Tzu, the author of *Tao Te Ching*, said, "Sky and earth are inhuman, they treat living beings like a straw dog." Straw dog—a dog made with straw, just a toy. When you look closely at things, at people, at living beings, you see so much suffering, you see so much injustice you cannot explain, and you blame sky and earth, you blame God, you blame the Creator. You see that there are so many people who are good-hearted and who continue to suffer so much and you ask why. Yet you can see many people who are very wicked, very mean, very cruel, unjustly enjoying very special treatment of society. And you revolt against this kind of thing.

In the Buddhist circle they used to explain this kind of injustice by the teaching of cause and effect, in the context of "three times." "Three times" means the past, present, and future. And they quoted this sentence: "If you want to know what kind of goal you have pursued in the past life, just look at yourself in the present life." If in the present life you suffer, it means in the former life you have done a lot of wicked things, cruel things. So if you suffer during this life, it's because you were doing bad things in the former life. Even if in this life you are trying to do good, you still have to suffer because in a past life you have done bad things. If the other person is doing cruel things but is still enjoying his situation, his special treatment, it's because in a former time in his past life he had done good things. That is why he enjoys the fruit of his good karma right now. To know the quality of your life in the future, you just look at the action you are doing in this life. If you are doing good things and if you are not happy yet, be sure that you will be happy in the future.

That is the way they explain in the Buddhist circle, in order to appease a little bit your tendency to revolt against injustice. Injustice, you can see it—a small nation occupied by a big nation for one thousand years; a nation destroyed by another nation with napalm, with defoliants. Millions of people die during a war. Think of the former Yugoslavia—a thousand people liquidated in the name of ethnic purification. The whole world community just stood by and allowed it to continue and continue and continue and continue. You want to revolt. You feel oppressed; you feel you have been the victim of injustice. You want to repair that and you think of military means,

political means, because you think that only political means and military means can repair injustice. By trying to repair the situation you may cause a lot of injustice at the same time. *Giai oan* is a Vietnamese term, "to undo injustice." *Giai* means "to untie." Injustice is like a rope binding you tightly and you suffer, and you want to remove that rope, and you naturally think of military means, sheer violence. You want political means to repair injustice. According to the Buddhist practice, the only way to undo the injustice is to enlarge your heart. Because only compassion, only loving kindness, only understanding, can answer to ignorance, can answer violence, can answer injustice, can answer cruelty.

A child, a charming little boy, catches a butterfly, and he takes the two wings of the butterfly by four fingers and he just tears like that—and the butterfly dies. The little boy laughs with joy. The little boy does not know that by doing that, he is destroying life. One day I saw a little boy doing like that, I told him, "My dear one, do you know that the butterfly has a sister, a mother? Tonight if the butterfly does not fly home, his parents will be very upset you know that? Don't you know that you are doing a very terrible thing to a butterfly?" And the child understood. From that moment on, he no longer caught butterflies. A few days later, when it was raining, he was collecting snails on the path and putting them back in the bushes, being afraid that if we step on the snails, the snails would not be able to go back to their fathers, their mothers, in the evening. "Lord, forgive him for what he is doing, because he does not know what he is doing." People are cruel; people are doing incredible things to other people because they are just ignorant. They don't know that what they are doing makes themselves suffer, not only the others suffer. They are acting in the name of the future, of happiness—happiness of humankind, happiness of the nations.

You embrace an ideology, a superb, superb ideology, and you want all your friends, all people in your country to unite, to realize the golden world, the utopia, because you are motivated by the desire to make this world beautiful, perfect, with happiness for all people. You are ready to embrace that superb ideology for the sake of your own nation, for the sake of the world community, and you believe that this is the only way for humankind, because that ideology is the cream of human intelligence. You do it out of goodwill. You kill, you exile, you lock them into psychiatric hospitals, you liquidate them, you bury them collectively, by hundreds of people, because of your love of humanity, because of your aspiration for a better future for humanity. "Lord, forgive them, because they don't know what they are doing."

Only when you practice understanding do compassion and loving kindness arise. Only when the nectar of compassion is born in your heart do you begin to stop suffering. There is no other way to undo injustice, except by the practice of deep looking in order to forgive, in order to accept. If your heart is small, it means that you have not practiced, you have not been able to see things. When you see that he, she, the other person, because of ignorance, has done that to you and your beloved one, you no longer blame.

[Bell]

Of course we have suffered, all of us. Not only the Bosnians, but also the Serbs. Not only the Palestinians, but also the Israelis. Both of us have suffered. But they continue to bear hatred, anger toward each other. They think that the only way to undo the injustice is to use political and military means, and they ask our friends to come and help us with these means—political and military forces. We don't know that the way out is love, is compassion. Love and compassion, how could they be possible if we don't open our heart, if we don't open our eyes in order to see that just because we are ignorant we are making each other suffer? Where is the world community? Are you there in order to help us to understand each other? To help us produce the nectar of compassion in our heart? Or are you there in order to support one side against the other and to egg us on to continue the fighting? The interest is not the interest of one side, one nation, one party. The interest is the interest of both, because we inter-are.

In Vietnam we say, "The father eats a lot of salt and it is the son who has to drink a lot of water." What the father does, the son has to bear. We have to inherit the fruit of the actions of our fathers. Why? Is that injustice? Because we are caught in the idea of self. My father did that, not me, why do I have to bear the retribution? But in the light of non-self, you are your father; you are the continuation of your father. If you are a young person and if you suffer, you should learn that you suffer for the sake of your father, your ancestors, and also your society. You have to learn in order to look, and when you say, "I suffer," it's okay: there should be someone who suffers for the sake of his father, for his grandfather, his countrymen. "I suffer, because I love. I suffer for all of them, because they did not know—that is why they have produced a lot of suffering. Now I suffer in order to redeem that kind of wrong doing." Suddenly you have enough courage in order to continue and to forbear the difficulties. Suddenly your heart opens and suffering is no longer unbearable for you because love is in you.

You know, what you do can make your father or your mother suffer. What you do can make your great-grandchild suffer in the future. That is why mindfulness helps us to stop causing suffering to the people we love and to ourselves. A child who at two years old gets a terrible sickness—who is responsible? You cannot say, "Dear little child, you suffer like that because in your former life you have done a terrible thing." You cannot say that. Who did the terrible thing so that the child has to suffer today? All of us—that is non-self. We belong to the same reality. There is a stream of life.

If you continue to sit there and to blame and to hate your parents, that means you have not practiced looking deeply. The better way is to sit down with your parents, to reconsider the situation, to look deeply in order to see how the suffering has come into being and how we can end the *samsara* and the vicious circle of suffering for our sake and for the sake of our children and grandchildren. Understanding opens the door of the heart. Suddenly we are able to accept each other because our heart has grown large thanks to the practice of looking deeply.

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# Beginning Anew

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Dear friends, today is the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, 1998. We are in the Upper Hamlet, and we are in the Spring Retreat. Today is *Vesak*, the day of the nativity of the Buddha. The life of the Buddha was supported by a kind of aspiration, a kind of desire, a kind of energy, that is to help, to help reduce the amount of suffering in the world, to bring about transformation and healing, to bring joy. That energy is important, that aspiration is important. The vitality of the life of the Buddha is the energy of compassion, the energy of understanding that can make the Buddha alive that can help him to continue the teaching so that many people will be able to liberate themselves. To be born means to begin anew, and all of us want to begin anew.

When we know how to begin anew we get a lot more energy, joy and aspiration that can help us transform what is negative in us, and help us have more joy, more capacity to transform the situation around us. To be born is a form of beginning anew. And that is why we should be able to be born as a new being at every moment of our lives. There are people who may say, "I am too old to begin again." That is because they have not seen the true nature of life, of the practice of Beginning Anew. We can practice Beginning Anew at any moment of our lives. To be born is to begin anew. When you are three years old you can begin anew, and when you are sixty years old you can still begin anew, and when you are about to die, that is still time to begin anew. We need to practice looking a little bit more deeply in order to see that Beginning Anew is possible at any time of our daily lives, at any age.

Suppose a cloud is floating in the sky, and is about to die, to become rain. The cloud could be caught in anger, in fear: "Why does this happen to me? Why do I have to die? Why can't I continue to be a cloud floating in the sky? So anger and fear may come to the cloud and make the cloud very unhappy; but if the cloud is intelligent enough, if the cloud knows how to look deeply into its true nature, then it can practice Beginning Anew. Tonight is also an opportunity to be reborn, and that is a preparation. We should not be caught in any form, because to be a cloud floating in the sky is wonderful, but to be the rain falling on the mountain or the river, on the trees and on the grass is also a wonderful thing. Even excitement is possible, hope is possible, joy is possible when dying. We know that there are people who are capable of dying in a very peaceful and happy way. I have seen people who die with contentment, with happiness, with a sense of fulfillment, and who do not regard their dying as the end of something, of their life. They have been able to look deeply into the nature of life, and they are emancipated from the notions of being and non-being. There are people who sit on the threshold of their house, and look at the children playing in the morning sunshine in the front yard, and watch their grandchildren playing happily. And when they look like that, they suddenly become their grandchildren. They see themselves as playing in the morning sunshine in the grass. They see their continuation in their grandchildren. They know that they have done everything that they could do in order for these children to be happy, to be well-prepared in order to enter life. They are ready to begin anew. They have already begun anew, and they can see themselves in new forms of life.

Of course, during their lifetimes they have made some mistakes. Because we are human beings, we cannot avoid making mistakes. We might have caused someone else to suffer, we might have offended our beloved ones, and we feel regret. But it is always possible for us to begin anew, and to transform all these kinds of mistakes. Without making mistakes there is no way to learn, in order to be a better person, to learn how to be tolerant, to be compassionate, to be loving, to be accepting. That is why mistakes play a role in our training, in our learning, and we should not get caught in the prison of culpability just because we have made some mistakes in our life.

If you can learn from your mistakes, then you have already transformed the garbage into a flower, for your own

joy, for the joy of your ancestors, for the joy of the future generations, and also for the joy of the person who was the victim of your ignorance and your lack of skillfulness. Very often we have done that out of our un-skillfulness, not because we wanted to harm that person, or we wanted to destroy the person, or because we wanted him or her to suffer. We were unskillful, that is all. I always like to think of our behavior in terms of it being more or less skillful, rather than in terms of good and evil. If you are skillful, you can avoid making yourself suffer, and making the other person suffer. If there is something you want to tell the other person, then yes, you have to tell it, but there is a way to tell it and make the other person suffer, and make you suffer. But there are other ways to say it that would not make the other person suffer, and yourself suffer also. So the problem is not whether to tell or not to tell what you have in your heart, the problem is how to tell it so that suffering will not be there. That is why this is a matter of art, and of our practice also.

Your goodwill is not enough for the practice—you have to be artful in your practice. Walking, eating, breathing, talking, working, you should learn the art of mindful living, because if you are a good artist, you will be able to create a lot of happiness and joy around you and inside of you; but if you have only your goodwill, if you count only on your goodwill, that will not be enough, because out of goodwill we may cause a lot of suffering. As a father, as a mother, as a daughter, as a son, we may be filled with goodwill, we may be motivated by the desire to make the other person happy, but out of our clumsiness we make them unhappy. That is why mindful living is an art, and each of us has to train himself or herself to be an artist. Instead of saying to someone, "You are right or wrong," which is a very difficult thing to hear, you might say, "You are more skillful or less skillful." In our Five Contemplations before eating we say that we want to be aware of our unskillful states of mind, instead of saying that we want to be aware of our evil states of mind. Unskillful—if you are angry or if you are jealous, that is only un-skillfulness. Because we are unskillful, anger and jealousy become mental formations. You know that that deed, that sentence, if we can do it or if we can pronounce it with art, it will help the other person, and it will help us.

All of us have to learn the art of living. And if you have the chance to meet with parents, friends and teachers who are skillful in the art of mindful living, then you can learn, and you will be able to make many people around you happy, and therefore you make yourself happy. But if you are not lucky, you cannot learn that art from your parents or from your brothers and sisters, or your friends, and you continue to be unskillful, and you make the people around you unhappy, and yourself unhappy. If we know how to look at things from that angle, we suffer much less already. That person who has caused me a lot of suffering just because he is unskillful, he didn't know what he said, he didn't know what he did. And we know our parents are full of love for us, they only want our happiness, but out of their un-skillfulness they make us suffer so much. And we also have our love for our parents, we don't want them to suffer, but our way of acting or reacting can make them suffer terribly. So it is not the issue of goodwill here, it is the issue of art.

Walking meditation is an art. You can make steps that create stability and joy, and that will nourish you every moment, but only if you have goodwill. "I will practice walking meditation!" And you become very stiff and very serious, you don't enjoy every step you make. You have to allow yourself to be natural, to be relaxed. You have to learn how to allow yourself to breathe naturally, allow your face to be relaxed, allow your feet to walk naturally; you know how to coordinate your steps with your breath, and allow nature to welcome you. Just a few steps can already introduce you to the Pure Land of the Buddha. You walk as an artist. When other people see you walking, they are inspired: "How wonderful! How beautifully that person walks! I can see the stability, the serenity, the joy." And they will be inspired, and they will learn the practice. It is not by writing letters or giving a sermon that we can help another person get in touch with the Dharma. Maybe because of our willingness to teach him, to share with him our practice, that person will want to get away from us. So there must be an art in order to share the Dharma and the spiritual life with the person we love.

In Asia, Buddhism is the practice of whole families. Everyone in the family is supposed to be a Buddhist. But in the West it happens that just one member of the family is fond of practicing mindfulness, but the other members of the family don't know anything about it and even find the practice very queer. And if you are not artful in your practice, you alienate yourself from the rest of the family. So you have to learn to practice in such a way that your practice will inspire the people around you. We have to practice not being caught by the form of the practice. You can practice in such a way that people don't see you practice. You can walk in such a way that people see that you are very natural, very relaxed, very joyful. There are those people who practice walking meditation that turn you off: it's too serious, too tight, not natural at all. And if you practice Buddhism in such a way you will not help the people in your family. Practice so that each day you become calmer, smiling more, and more open. Then one day your companion will be inspired to ask, "How can you do it? In such a situation, how can you still smile? What is your secret?" That is the time when you can share your practice—but not before. You cannot impose your practice

on him or on her. This is an art.

(Bell)

We know that the core of the Buddha's teaching is non-self. This is something people find very hard to accept, because everyone believes that there is a self, and you are yourself, you are not the other person. But with the practice of looking deeply, we see things differently. You see yourself as a person, a human being; you say that you are not a tree, you are not a squirrel, and you are not a frog. You are not the other person. That is because we have not looked deeply into our true nature. If we do, we will see that we are at the same time a tree. It is not only in our past lives that we have been a tree or a rock or a cloud, but even in this life, in this very moment, you continue to be a tree, you continue to be a rock, you continue to be a cloud. In fact you cannot take the tree out of you, you cannot take the cloud out of you, you cannot take the rock out of you., because if you could, you would no longer be there as yourself. In the Jataka stories it is said that in past lives the Buddha had been a squirrel, a bird, deer, an elephant, a tree. It's very poetic, but it does not mean that when the Buddha was a human person living in the city of Sravasti, he was no longer a tree, a rock, a deer. He continued to be all of these. So when I look into myself, I see I still am a cloud, not only during a past life, but right now.

There is a lady who wrote a poem about her husband, who is a student of mine. That student of mine is very fond of my teaching. And she said, "My husband has a mistress, and his mistress is an old man who sometimes dreams of being a cloud." I don't think that description of me is correct, because I am not dreaming of being a cloud—I am a cloud. At this very moment you could not take the cloud out of me; if you took the cloud out, I would collapse straight away. You cannot take the tree out of me; if you did, I would collapse. So looking deeply into our true nature, we see that what we call self is made only of non-self elements. This is a very important practice, and it does not seem as difficult as we may imagine. So you are the son, but you are not only the son, you are the father. If you take the father out of you, you collapse. You are the continuation of your father, of your mother, of your ancestors. That is non-self. Son is made of father, and father is made of son, and so on. And the practice is that every day we have the opportunity to look at things in such a way--otherwise we live in a very shallow way, and we don't get to the heart of life. A young man may say, "I hate my father. I don't want to have anything to do with my father." He is very sincere, because every time he thinks of his father, anger is coming up. It's very unpleasant, so he wants to separate himself from his father, and he is determined to do so. But how could such a thing be possible? How can you take your father out of you? The hard fact is that you are your father. It's better to reconcile with your father within. There is no other way out. You can behave like that when you believe in the reality of self, but the moment that you see the true nature of self, you can no longer behave like that. You know that the only way is to accept, to reconcile and to transform. You know that it is the discrimination; it is the ignorance in you, which has caused the suffering.

The other day Sister Phuoc Nghiem practiced Touching the Earth alone in the meditation hall to pray for her grandmother. She had also asked all her big sisters and younger sisters to gather in order in order to pray and to send energies to her grandmother who had passed away, but she also practiced alone, touching the earth. During the first year of practicing here she thought very often that one day one dear member of her family might pass away, and how she would deal with that. And every time in Plum Village that there was a ceremony of prayer for someone who passed away, that thought would reoccur: "How shall I deal with the situation when I hear that a member of my family has passed away?" Then one day she heard that the baby that her sister had given birth to had passed away just a few hours after birth, and her sister suffered quite a lot. Her sister lives in Germany. And when she talked to her, Sister Phuoc Nghiem noticed the suffering, the instability, and the despair in the voice of her sister. Because her sister suffered so much, Sister Phuoc Nghiem also suffered, and she tried to practice in order to suffer less, because she knew that if she did not suffer less, she would not be able to help her sister. She telephoned her mother in Vietnam, and her mother said, "It was better like that than to raise the child for two or three years and then have him die later, when the suffering would be much more intense. Because after two or three years of raising a child, attachment will be much deeper, and of course the suffering would be much greater. So, you consider it to be like the squash in the garden...there are flowers that wither and do not become a squash, and that is true with humans. There are children that we can keep, and there are children that we cannot keep, right from the beginning. That is something that happens."

When Sister Phuoc Nghiem talked to me, I told her the story about my brother. Before I came, my mother was pregnant, and she miscarried. Sometimes I asked whether that was my brother or that was me, who did not want to come out, because I judged that the time was not appropriate for me to come out. That was also a meditation on self and non-self. When I said, "Was that my brother or was that me?" I was using the words "brother" and "me"



as two separate entities. But if we look deeply into it, we see that my brother is me, and I am my brother, so you can see the reality of not-one, not-two in it. When we look at the father and the son, and we see the non-dualistic reality, the inter-being of the two, we can see the same thing with our brother and ourselves. I cannot take my brother out of me, my brother cannot take me out of himself, so my brother and I inter-are. We cannot say that we are one or we are two, because one and two are concepts. "The same" is a concept, "the different" is another concept, and reality transcends all concepts. So it is applied with father and son, younger brother and big brother, and we can see a stream of life.

When Sister Phuoc Nghiem practiced Touching the Earth for her grandmother, she found out many interesting things. Before doing so she was practicing walking meditation on Sunset Boulevard of the Upper Hamlet, and she saw the vineyard, the wheat fields, and she was walking and seeing that her grandmother was walking with her. She remembered that when she was a little girl her grandmother used to lullaby her with Vietnamese lullabies. During her first and second years as a nun in Plum Village, she would often think of the days she would go back to Vietnam and she would walk like that with her grandmother, whom she loved so much. She had good times with her grandmother. She said that now she doesn't have to wait anymore—her grandmother has come here and is doing walking meditation with her, and that her grandmother would be happy to see the fields of wheat, because they look very much like the rice fields in Vietnam. While she practiced Touching the Earth she saw that her grandmother also practiced Touching the Earth before, but this is the first time that she had practiced Touching the Earth in the Plum Village way. In the Plum Village style you stay in the position of Touching the Earth for a long time, at least three in-breaths and three out-breaths, and she found it wonderful that her grandmother was practicing Touching the Earth in the Plum Village style with her. She looked at her hand and said, "This is my hand, but this is also my mother's hand, and this is my grandmother's hand..." So she could see the presence of her grandmother in her left hand, and then she held her left hand with her right hand, and she felt very clearly that she was holding the hand of her grandmother. And this was something very real, and not imagination. And she cried because of that happiness. She no longer felt that she was separated from her grandmother, her grandmother is within her and is practicing with her, and any smile she makes is to liberate herself and to liberate her grandmother at the same time. So that is a good practice: you can see the nature of inter-being between you and your grandmother. It's like when I look into myself and I see the nature of inter-being between the cloud and myself. The cloud and I cannot be taken away from each other.

What you did in the past out of your un-skillfulness is like that. If in the past you did something unskillful, it is because of many conditions: you did not have a father that could help you at that moment; you did not have a mother or a teacher to help you in that moment to be more skillful than you were; and the seed of that lack of skillfulness has been transmitted to you by many generations. You were not able to recognize that seed in you; you made a mistake; you did unskillful things. It means that all of your ancestors did it together with you at that moment. Looking from the insight of non-self, you see that everyone was doing the unskillful thing that you did, with you. You have to see it, and the essential is that you are free from the notion of self. It is clear that when you are able to breathe in mindfully and smile, all generations of ancestors in you are smiling at the same time. Not only your ancestors, but the future generations in you are able to smile with you; so every time you made a mistake, every time you did an unskillful thing, everyone was doing it with you. Now that you have come in touch with the Dharma, you realize that that was an unskillful thing to do, and you are motivated by the desire that you will never do it again.

I said before that if we have not made any mistakes, there is no way for us to learn. So that is why to look deeply, and to see the nature of the act, the nature of inter-being of the act in the light of non-self, we see that that is a kind of act, that is a kind of speech that has created suffering. That moment when you see it, when you recognize it, that is enlightenment, because enlightenment is always enlightenment of something, or about something. The moment when you see that this is the lack of skillfulness on your part and on the part of many ancestors who have transmitted the seed to you, then that is already enlightenment, that is already meditation, that is already deep looking. And out of that enlightenment you are motivated by a desire that you would not like to do that again. So that desire, that aspiration is a strong energy, a strong energy that can make you alive, that can help you to protect yourself, to protect all the future generations within you, and that insight is very liberating. And if you know that you are not going to do the same thing again, you are already free, and your ancestors are also free, and there is no need to be caught in your feeling of culpability.

(bell)

The Buddhist teaching on Beginning Anew is very clear: "The un-skillfulness comes from our mind, and the un-

skillfulness can be transformed by our mind. If the transformation happens in your consciousness, then the unskillfulness will disappear as a reality in the manifested world. The mind is like a painter." This is the Buddha's teaching, that the mind is a painter. The painter can paint anything, and the painter can erase everything. So if in the past you have painted something you don't like, and if you are determined not to paint it again, then you erase all of that. It depends on your mind, your consciousness. If there is light, there is enlightenment in your consciousness; there is a strong determination, the awareness that "This is something negative, this is something harmful, this something not beneficial, and I am determined not to allow it to happen again," and then the mind is transformed. And when the mind is transformed, liberation is already there for you and all your ancestors, and if you are still caught in that feeling of culpability, that is because you have not done the work of Beginning Anew, it means that you have not practiced looking deeply into your clumsiness, your lack of skillfulness. If you had, then you would see that many conditions had come together for that action or that sentence to become possible. And now, with your enlightenment, with your determination, you will never allow these conditions to come together again in order to repeat the same thing. Your awareness, your enlightenment, is the element that will prevent these conditions coming together again.

If your practice of Beginning Anew has not been successful, that is because your capacity of looking deeply into the reality of the situation is not deep enough, because there has not been any transformation within your consciousness, or within the consciousness of your partner, the other person. It's not because the method isn't effective, it's because you have not really practiced it. The practice of Beginning Anew is to transform your mind deeply, and in order to get a transformation; you have to look very deeply, in the light of inter-being. I always tell my students that whatever you do, I do it with you, so please be careful. That is true; and whatever I do, you do it with me. If I break the precepts, if I behave in an irresponsible way, all my students will bear all the fruit that is very clear. So I cannot afford to make you suffer. That is a very strong energy that keeps me in the good practice, because I know very well that if I am not mindful, if I am not practicing correctly, all my students, my disciples will suffer. The same thing is true with my disciples: if they don't practice mindful manners, if they don't practice the precepts, if they make each other suffer, I suffer; I will have to shoulder everything, because we inter-are. We cannot be separated. The teacher cannot be a teacher without students, and the students cannot be students without a teacher.

So if Beginning Anew has not brought the wanted result, it is because you have not done it at the base. You might have done it with talking back and forth, but you have not seen deeply that you and the other person inter-are. If you have seen that, the result will come right away. When I was in Italy, we held a retreat not far from Rome and we went to a field of olive trees. I noticed that the olive trees were growing in groups of three or four, and I was surprised. But I found out that there had been a very cold year and all the olive trees had died, and for that reason they had cut all the trees at the level of the ground, and then they brought in more soil, and the next year the young olive trees came up. From one olive tree, there were now two or three or four olive trees. And I gave a Dharma talk to the children in Italy, and I said that you and your brother and your sister, you think that you are three, but in fact, if you touch your roots deeply you will see that you are one. So to get angry with your sister or your brother is wrong; instead, you have to help him or her, because to help him or her is to help yourself. So that is the way I taught "non-self" to the children, and they understood right away.

There was a little girl who did not like her brother, and since she was watching a lot of television, she had the tendency to eliminate what she didn't like. And one day she said, "Why don't we eliminate younger brother?" It was very dangerous. You don't like your young brother, you just wish your young brother would vanish, and you imagine you can do it easily, like using a remote control. But after the Dharma talk I gave to her, and the teaching given by some brothers and sisters who accompanied me, the girl went home and was transformed. And one day she told her brother, "Brother, I'm here for you. What do you need? I'll do it for you." So wisdom and enlightenment are possible even with very young children. If you touch the ground of being deeply, you will find the nature of inter-being, and you will feel it's much better to help the other person, than to be angry at him and to punish him, because when you punish him you punish yourself somehow. Imagine a father and son always trying to punish each other: both of them suffer, and continue to suffer.

During the Vietnam War there was an American soldier who got very angry because most of the soldiers in his unit got killed in an ambush by Vietnamese guerrillas; that happened in a village in the countryside, so out of his rage he wanted to retaliate. He wanted to kill a number of people who belonged to that village. So he took out a bag of sandwiches, and he mixed explosives into the sandwiches and left them at the entrance to the village. He saw children coming out and happily taking the sandwiches, thinking that someone had left these delicious sandwiches, and they ate together, enjoying a lot. And just half an hour later he saw them begin to show signs of suffering.

Their father and their mother and sister came, and tried to help, to give them massage and medicine, but the American soldier who had hidden himself not far from there, knew very well there was no way to save these children, and that they would die. He knew that even if they had a car to transport these children to the hospital it would be too late. Out of anger he had done things like that. If anger is strong in us, we are capable of doing anything, even the cruelest things.

When he went back to America he suffered because of that: that scene appeared to him in his dreams, and he could never forget it. Any time during the day if he found himself alone in a room with children, he could not stay, and had to run out of the room right away. He could not talk about that to anyone except to his mother, who said, "Well, that was the war, and in a war you cannot prevent these things happening." But that did not help him, until he came to a retreat organized by Plum Village in North America. During many days he was not able to tell people of his story. It was a very difficult retreat. We sat in circles of five or six people, and invited people to speak out about their suffering, but there were those who sat there unable to open their mouths. There were war veterans who were deeply wounded inside, and fear and despair were still there. When we did walking meditation I saw one or two walking far behind, at least twenty meters behind us. I did not understand why they did not join us, but walked far away like that. When someone inquired, they learned that these ex-soldiers were afraid of being ambushed. So they walked far behind so that if something happened they would have enough space to run away. And one war veteran set up a tent in the jungle, and in order to appease his fear, he set up booby traps around his tent. That happened in the retreat in North America...he always had the guerrillas around him, and in him, ready to kill him at any time. Finally that American Vietnam War veteran was able to tell us the story of the explosives put into the sandwiches. It was very good for him to be able to tell it, especially in front of the Vietnamese people, his former enemies. I gave him a prescription. I had a private consultation with him, and I said, "Now look, you killed five children, yes. And that is not a good thing to do, yes. But don't you know that many children are dying in this very moment, everywhere, even in America, because of lack of medicine, of food? Do you know that 40,000 children die every day in the world, just because of the lack of medicine and food? And you are alive you are solid physically. Why don't you use your life to help the children who are dying in this moment? Why get caught in the five children who have died in the past? There are many ways...if you want, I will tell you how to save five children today. There are children who need only one tablet of medicine to be saved, and you can be the one who brings that tablet of medicine to him or to her. If you practice like that every day, the children who died because of the explosives will smile in you, because these five children have participated in your work of saving many children who are dying in this very moment."

So, the door was opened, so that the man was longer trapped in the feeling of culpability. That is the *amrita*, the ambrosia of compassion, of wisdom, offered by the Buddha: there is always a way out. So that war veteran has practiced and has been able to help many other children in the world. He has gone back to Vietnam, has done the work of reconciliation, and the five children who died have begun to smile in him and to become one with him. In the beginning it was a distressing image, but now the five children have become alive, have become the energy helping him to live with compassion, with understanding. The garbage can be transformed into flowers if we know how to do it.

If you are a person who has been sexually abused as a child, and if you have suffered, you can also practice in order to heal your wound, in very much the same way. What you should do is described very clearly in the Five Mindfulness Trainings: "I vow to protect the integrity, the safety of families, couples. I vow to do my best to protect children from sexual abuse." That is something you can do. And if you take the vow in front of the Sangha, the Buddha, and the Dharma, to devote your life to protecting children who are now being threatened in this very moment, your childhood wound will be healed. You'll get a lot of joy, and your suffering will be turned into a flower. If you had not suffered like that you would not be a protector of children, as you are today. So you look back at your suffering and you are thankful to it, thankful that it happened, so that you could become a bodhisattva protecting children. That is the wonderful thing about the Dharma: the Dharma always offers a way out, provided that you know how to look deeply into the nature of your suffering. There's no need to cling to that suffering. If you are still caught, that means you have not practiced looking deeply, you have not given rise to the energy of compassion in yourself, so that you become an instrument of the Dharma, an instrument of the Buddha.

(bell)

If you have offended someone, if you have made someone suffer, that wound is still in you. And if you want the wound to heal, you can practice like this: you sit quietly and you look into the nature of the deed, or the speech you have made in the past. You say, "I am sorry, I did it out of clumsiness, out of a lack of understanding; I was

ignorant, no-one had shown me. I have made you suffer, my dear, and I have made myself suffer a lot also, so I promise that I'll never do it again. And I do it for myself, for you, and for many generations to come." If you can do it, you will see that the person in you will smile. Usually we think that the past is already gone, you cannot go back to the past and repair things in the past, but that is not true. There is always a way out, according to the Dharma, because according to the Dharma the past is there in the form of the present, because the wound is still there. So touch your wound deeply, and say, "This is a product of a lack of wisdom, compassion, the product of ignorance. I can see its effect on me, on the world and on the other person, and I am motivated by the desire not to allow it to happen again." That kind of wisdom, that kind of light, that kind of determination, that kind of love, becomes a very powerful source of energy that will prevent conditions coming together in order for the same thing to happen again. Just sit down and breathe quietly, and tell him or her that you are sorry and that you will not do it again, and you do it for you, for him, for her, and you will see him or her smiling to you, and you are free. And your freedom is his freedom; your freedom is the freedom of all your ancestors, your children and their children. Everything comes from the mind. If the mind is transformed, everything will transform. That is the teaching of Beginning Anew in Buddhism.

In the practice we always go back to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, not as notions but as reality. The Sangha is something that you can touch, that you can live with every day. The Dharma also, the living Dharma. The living Dharma is something you can produce with every step you make, with every breath you take, with every minute of sitting, of working. The Buddha said, let us take refuge only in what is solid. There is an island within, you should go back to the island of mindfulness, and touch the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha in it, and you should not rely on things that are impermanent, that can collapse at any time. If you have a strong conviction in the Dharma, there is no reason for you to be afraid of anything. In order to have confidence in the Dharma, you have to be successful in the practice. There is anger, there is jealousy, there is confusion, and because you have been offered the Dharma to practice, you have had a chance to transform these afflictions in the past, and because of that your faith, your confidence in the Dharma has increased a lot. That is for your benefit and the benefit of all of us. Therefore, taking refuge in the Dharma is very important. You will no longer be afraid. If you take refuge in the Dharma, you know that whatever happens to you, you will be able to manage in order to preserve your peace, your stability. The Buddha said take refuge in the Dharma and not anything else. Of course, as a practitioner you need a teacher, you need a Dharma brother, you need a Dharma sister. But what makes the teacher a teacher is the Dharma. What makes a Dharma brother a Dharma brother is the Dharma. So you rely on the substance of Dharma, and not just the physical presence of that person you call teacher, or brother or sister. If he is your brother in the Dharma, it is because he has the Dharma in him. If he is your Dharma teacher, it is because the Dharma inhabits him. So if you learn how to take refuge in the Dharma, then even if the teacher is no longer there, the Dharma brother is no longer there, you are still solid, you will not collapse, because it is the Dharma that you take refuge in, and not something else.

Suppose you have had the experience of a panic attack, or a depression; if you have adopted some practice in order to survive that panic attack, that depression, you know that you have the Dharma in yourself. Next time it comes I can smile to it, because I know how to deal with a storm. So to rely on the dharma, and not to rely on anything else, is the recommendation made by the Buddha. There are people who ask how they can survive without a house, a bank account, or this person or that person, but if you have confidence within yourself, wherever you go you can create conditions to be alive, in such a way that you can contribute to the well-being of the world. There was a lady who was a refugee among the boat people who arrived on the coast of Thailand, and she was robbed of all the gold that she had brought. Because the sea pirates took everything from her—all her belongings, the money, the jewels—she was only able to keep one tiny piece of gold in her mouth. Upon arrival she asked, "How can I survive with only this much gold?" Next to her there was a gentleman who had been robbed of everything except his shorts—his shirt was taken, his trousers, everything—and he was laughing and laughing. He said, "How can I survive with only these shorts?" He was very happy because he had confidence in himself. To be alive, that was largely enough for him; he did not need anything else. So we should cultivate a kind of non-fear: if we practice the Dharma, and we can count on the Dharma, then there is no reason why we should be afraid of anything, even if we know that life is impermanent. We can lose a beloved one in the future, and the whole world is our refuge.

There are still many other questions which have not been answered. One more question is about the feeling of not being good enough: "How can you know that you are not good enough, based on what criterion do you see that you are not good enough?" In the retreat that we offered at the University of California at Santa Barbara, there were many new people, and they were not used to the Buddhist way of bowing, of standing, of greeting, and they were a little bit confused as to what was the right thing to do. And my answer was that you don't have to do anything: if you are mindful, that is good enough. The problem is not to bow, or not to bow, the problem is to be mindful or not

be mindful. So if you know that you are practicing mindfulness, and mindfulness has become more of energy, a reality in your daily life, you know that you are advancing well on the path. Even if you still have many shortcomings, much un-skillfulness, if you know that you are cultivating mindfulness every day, I think that is good enough, not only for you, but for all of us.

(Three bells)

(End of talk)

**Dear Friends,**

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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## The Sutra on The Full Awareness Of Breathing.

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Today is January 18, 1998 we are in the Upper Hamlet. Today we are reading the poem about impermanence. This poem reminds us that our lives change every day, every minute, every second in order for us to live more diligently. This is the evening chant for Monday evening. "This day is already over. My life is shortened. I try to live more deeply. What have I done with my 24 hours?" The Gatha continues...I look deeply, what have I done with this day? Perhaps during this day, because of my forgetfulness has led me to be angry with someone. I was irritated. I have not treasured my 24 hours. That is what I have done. I look deeply to see what I have done. Have you made one step toward mindfulness? Have you lived your life deeper? Have you tried to do something good for someone you love and someone you don't love? Have you tried to transform a number of your negative energies?

I propose when you read these Gathas you read very slowly in order to have time to look deeply. In the Sino-Vietnamese text there is an imagery of a fish who sees the water in its pond becoming less. You are the fish living in that pond whose quantity of water becomes less and the fish starts to become worried. So our practice is to live deeply in the present moment, our wisdom is to see that we are inter-dependent. I did not put this imagery into the poem in Vietnamese because the imagery of the fish is too anguished and I think that is not part of my teaching. The teaching should be to look deeper and to transmit all your wisdom to others. So even if the water is no longer there you can continue to be other things and not just the fish. So there is no fear.

We only try and look deeply so that we are our own architect of our own life. You construct your own life. You do not regret anything because you have the decision to construct your own daily life and when you ask yourself "What have I done during this day?" you have to stop and look deeply. I decided not to put this imagery of the gatha into the Vietnamese version because I remember in the past when I wrote it from the Chinese version of the fish in despair because of the water in its pond being drained, people became dispirited. We know that when we cease to be this body we will be something else wonderful so we have no fear and no sadness. One day is very short so I must look deeply to see what I have done during that day and urge yourself to be more diligent. The Sangha should be very diligent and practice whole heartedly and try to live deeply our lives with a lot of freedom. We have to remind ourselves that life is impermanent and don't let every second, every minute go by in forgetfulness. Without mindfulness you cannot live deeply your life. When you live your life deeply every day is fine. This Gatha is to remind ourselves that life is impermanent and that everything changes. What you live today will change tomorrow but if today is lived deeply and if tomorrow it changes, this will also be very deep. Every change is a treasure. We have no fear. Every changing moment will be a new experience, a wonderful experience. We don't have to be fearful. I have made some changes to the poem in Sino-Vietnamese like the patriarchs have done in the past.

When you look at the sunset-- you know that the sunset can last only 5-10 minutes. During this 5 or 10 minutes you look deeply. There is this wonderful sunset in this second and the next second another wonderful sunset. You observe hundreds of seconds of this sunset. Hundreds of different moments. Every moment is a treat. Every moment is a joy. So after the sunset you enjoy other non-sunsets -- when you look deeper. Every moment you look deeply you are not attached. Each wonderful moment leads to another wonderful moment. You are not stuck to the beauty of the sunset because after the sunset, there are other beautiful things. To be happy as a 20-year-old is wonderful, so too as a 30-year-old. Being 40 years old is also wonderful. 80 year old is also wonderful. If at 20 years old you live deeply, you are alive. And if at 30 year old you live deeply-- you are alive. You enjoy every moment of your life because you have lived deeply every moment of our life.

A number of us when we came here we think we must go to another place to be happy. Before going to this other place you dream a lot about that place and when you arrive you say, "Oh, it is nothing interesting" so you dream of yet another place. There are these people who go around dreaming of other places. If, at first sight, you see that it is not interesting, then you dwell deeply in the present moment in concentration and you then discover many wonderful moments in that place where at first you felt that there was nothing of interest. So every

moment is a wonderful moment, if you live deeply and if you live without attachment you live in freedom. You enjoy every moment. You know that life is about change. Don't let any moment pass in forgetfulness. So I wish you to learn and practice this poem. We will go to the next chant, the chant for Tuesday morning.

We always begin by sitting meditation and the slowing walking meditation around the zendo before we start the chanting. We turn our attention to the Buddha and the Sangha in the Katha Mountain, meaning that everyone in the Sangha will be together facing the Buddha. We go to the Anapanasati Sutra, the Sutra on the 16 methods of breathing taught by the Buddha. The other day Thay received a letter from a Spanish woman of 23. She was so impressed after reading Thay's book she said, "thanks to your book I discover something very wonderful. I only need to go back to my breathing and then I have happiness. How things are so simple! I tried it and it really works. Really. As I go back to my breathing and look deeply into the present moment suddenly I realised I am very happy. In the past I looked for my happiness in dreaming about this or that and I am not satisfied when I have them. I never have happiness. After reading your book I go back to my breath and I look deeper and I say "Oh, how wonderful!" looking into my present moment at the conditions available to me. I discover that I am so happy. At 23 I have my youth and I have good health. I have all the conditions to be happy. Yet, in the past, I was running and searching for happiness. It is so wonderful and I want to come here." Thay was the same. The day he discovered this Sutra he was so happy because in the past he tried to learn this sutra and was satisfied with a lot of knowledge but he didn't know how to enjoy the present moment. He did not know how to look deeply into this life, where he was able to enjoy his youth, the conditions he had. So the day he discovered this Sutra he was so happy, he thought he discovered the greatest treasure in the world. That Sutra is called Anapanasati in Pali.

Looking deeply into the first exercise, breathing "In and Out". This Sutra has been circulated in Vietnam during the first century after Christ. The one who translated it was An The Cao. He was Chinese and lived in China but because there was a war in China so he went to Vietnam at that time called Giao Chau, the former name of Vietnam. When he arrived at Giao Chau he saw a larger centre of practice of Buddhism than where he was back in China. He met with a teacher called Tang Hoi whose parents were of Sochen origin. The family emigrated from India to Vietnam because they were commercial tradespeople. His father married a Vietnamese girl and then when they gave birth to a little child both of them died. This orphan was taken care of by the monks in a temple and later went on to become a very famous monk called Tang Hoi. He became the abbot in charge of a large practice centre in Vietnam. When An The Cao went to Vietnam he came across this large Buddhist centre where Tang Hoi belonged. Tran Tue brought to Tang Hoi this sutra and asked him to do a commentary on it and he would write a foreword. Tran Tue made commentaries on this. We then put this into the Tripitaka. In Chinese you have this Sutra translated by Tang Hoi and placed in the Tripitaka. This sutra has been translated into Vietnamese by Thay and has been published in the Vietnamese Buddhist history. Sister Chan Duc has already translated these parts into English. All these stories took place around the 3rd century. Tang Hoi translated many sutras into Vietnamese and at the end of the 3rd century he went to China in order to teach Buddhism to the Chinese. When the Chinese came to Vietnam they destroyed all our books and history so we had to restore them. Thanks to the Chinese history, we discovered Tang Hoi came from Vietnam because it was described that Tang Hoi was a Chinese monk who came from a small province of China called Giao Chau. They called Giao Chau a little province of China. It was also the largest Buddhist centre in the country.

It is said that this monk was half-Vietnamese and half-Indian. He travelled from south to north and converted King Ngo Dong Quyen into Buddhism. After this the first Buddhist temple was built. King Ngo Dong occupied a large amount of the southern state of China. He was so impressed by Buddhism and built beautiful temples. We only need to know that this sutra existed in Vietnam at the beginning of the third century. The Vietnamese practised a lot of these sutras around Vietnam. The one we are reading here I translated not from the Chinese but from the Pali Sutra. In the Chinese text of the Tripitaka this sutra has the name "The Great Sutra on Breathing". In this Great Sutra I don't know why the main text is not very clear. Why the commentaries are so long. Why the main text was not very obvious-- not very simple and clear like it is in the Pali text. That is why I use the Pali text in order to translate directly into Vietnamese.

This sutra exists in many other sutras in Chinese. It is also in the Agama sutra. If I combine the three sutras; 815, 803, and 810 of the Agama then these three together equals the

Anapanasati sutra in Pali. There are so many parts lost whilst the commentaries remain I discovered these 16 exercises in the Pali canon. In the Majjimanikaya 180 everything is so simple and very clear, the 16 exercises put in a very clear way. So when I read these three suttas in the Chinese canon I see them in the Majjimanikaya 180, they are almost 95% correct and similar, there are a few differences that are not so important.

This Sutra has been transmitted in Sanskrit by the Sravasti School in Kashmir and transmitted in Pali in Sri Lanka. What has been transmitted verbally into Sanskrit and verbally and directly into Pali spread to Sri Lanka and then to northern India and then to China. And now 2500 years later you find almost the same translation. It is so wonderful. When the Buddha gave the teaching he gave it verbally. He refused to use any complicated writing; he said he wanted people to practice more than to be scholars. It has been transmitted verbally many hundred of years before it was written down into Sanskrit in the northern part of India and into Pali in the eastern part of India. After that it spread into all the countries in the south. The Sanskrit version spread into many countries in the north like Tibet, Bhutan and China. After 2500 years we compare these two versions and we find they are almost the same. It is wonderful.

The Sutra was given by the Buddha in Sravasti in the state of Kusala. It is so basic and so wonderful. There are so many great suttas but without this one it is like you want to go to the top of the mountain but there are no path leading there. This sutra is like the stairs for you to climb into the most beautiful Sutra of Mahayana Buddhism. When I discovered this Sutra I felt so happy.

In the time of the Buddha there were neither fax nor telephone. So disciples of the Buddha would hear of him giving teachings but would not know where, in which region. Thus there was an agreement that after a 3-month rains retreat, the Buddha stayed in Sravasti in order for all his disciples from different parts of the country to have the chance to come and listen to him. So usually after the 3 months rains retreat in Sravasti the Buddha would stay an extra 4th month. It was on the occasion of the full moon day of the fourth month of the rains season that the Buddha taught this Sutra.

At that time in Sravasti in the Jeta Grove there were many famous disciples of the Buddha like Shariputra, Moggallāna, Kassapa, and amongst them there were elder monks and young monks, those who already have the lamp transmission and others not yet with transmission but are still regarded as Dharma teachers if they had under went at least 5 consecutive rains retreats. So they have the duty to take care of themselves and the younger brothers in the Dharma. The senior Bhikkhus in the community were diligently instructing the Bhikkhus who were new in the practice. Some instructed 10 students, some 20 students, others 30 or 40.

When you are a novice you have to take refuge in one older sister or brother in the practice. So as a Bhikkhu or Bhikkhuni after 5 years of practice you have the duty to take care of the novices and younger Bhikkhunis or Bhikkhus .

We have to organise in such a way that those who have just become a novice monk or nun must have a supporting brother or a supporting sister. Those who practice longer not only take refuge in the elders in the practice but have to take care of the younger persons in the practice too.

There are those who might have just received the big ordination and become a Bhikkhu or Bhikkhuni and think "Now that I am a Bhikkhu/ni can I leave the community?" In fact Thāy says that it is the actual beginning of the training and not a time for leaving.

That night there was a full moon. Lord Buddha was sitting in the open air and his disciples were gathered around him. Looking over the assembly he began to speak;

"Oh, Bhikkhus, I am pleased to observe the fruit you have attained in your practice. Yet I know you can make even more progress." The Buddha praised his community of practice. He didn't praise his own community to other people but when he praises it was to encourage the community to be diligent in the practice.

He said that he is very pleased that in his community of practice there are those who are mature, there are those who are not mature but trying their best to practice. "Our community of practice is truly a community of practice. Our community is not adorned with superficial things.



I see that you all are young in the practice but you all practice properly and I am very pleased that you practice according to the teaching.

"Our community is like the field of merit. When people make offerings to this community they make a real investment because this community is really practising sincerely in order to spread the Dharma."

"Dear Friends:

In our community I see those who have attained Arahantship". An Arahant is somebody who deserves to receive offerings. An Arahant is someone who is able to transform all the negative energies like anger, hatred, craving, doubt, jealousy, and so on.

We call those who deserve to receive offerings Arahants because they have already let go of all afflictions and have attained great wisdom and liberation.

"And there are those who are able to cut off all attachments and have attained the state of No Return" -- it means you decide to go on the right path and you will never return to the path of the bandit, of the pirate, of the negative things.

Like those who have been a drug user and although they decide to give up drugs, but they still long to go back to taking drugs again, even if they have the good intention to stop.

When conditions are not favourable they are always pulled by the conditions to use drugs. When these drug users decide to practice properly they arrive at the state called 'no return' meaning they taste all the good fruits of not taking drugs. No Returning to the direction of drugs, of heroin, of alcohol, of negative things. When you are carried away by all these things you are swallowed by craving, by anger, by crime. The Buddha said to his gathering of disciples "Among you are those who have attained the state of No Return, Arahantship, and have already cut all afflictions and burdens and realised Great wisdom. No return means to cut the Five Hindrances: craving, anger, confusion, doubt, and arrogance. Those who have cut all five hindrances have arrived at the state of No Return. Others who have cut the first three hindrances: craving, anger, and confusion but still have some arrogance, some doubt, attain the state called Once-Returner. They still have to transform their most subtle negative energy.

By cutting the first three hindrances you attain Stream Entry. You enter into the stream of the community of practice. Entering the Stream is to join the great many others who are practising. By continuing to practice you gradually arrive at these different states. When you become a Stream-enterer it is like entering a stream of water that will take you to the ocean. It means entering into the stream is already a big step. So even if you don't come to practice for long, since you have decided to come here you have already entered into the stream.

"There are those of you who practice the Four Foundations of Mindfulness ."

There are those who are practising the Four Dilligences which is to develop that which is good and positive already present in you. If you observe your good energy you develop your good energy . If you observe your negative energy you learn ways to transform them.

"There are those who practice the 7 Factors of Enlightenment, there are those of you who practice Maitriya, others who practice Karuna, Upecha, others who choose the practice of looking at the impermanence of the body."

So each person has chosen the appropriate practice for his or her body or mind. All are learning ways to practice faithfully according to their appropriate path and the Buddha is very pleased with everyone.

"There are those who practice the Four Right Efforts.

There are those who practice the Four Bases of Success.

There are those who practice the Five Faculties

There are those who practice the Seven Factors of Awakening.

There are those who practice the Noble Eightfold Path.

There are those who practice Loving-Kindness.

There are those who practice Compassion.

There are those who practice Joy.

There are those who practice Equanimity.

There are those who practice the Nine Contemplations.

There are those who practice the Observation of Impermanence.

There are also Bhikkhus who are already practising the Full Awareness of Breathing. From practising the Four Foundations of mindfulness by following your breathing you will arrive at the practice of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment."

When you practice the Seven Factors of Enlightenment you will not leave your conscious breathing. If you practice diligently the Seven Factors of Enlightenment you arrive at deep insight and liberation.

Don't say that if you practice conscious breathing you will then arrive at the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. Don't say that only after the Four or Five Measures of Mindfulness you then arrive at the Seven Factors of Enlightenment. No, you have to practice conscious breathing in every state until you are liberated. Even while you are practising the Foundations of Mindfulness or practising the Seven Factors of Enlightenment you always practice conscious breathing. With the conscious breath you arrive at deep insight and liberation. I am sure even after the Buddha was enlightened he continued to follow his conscious breathing.. Conscious breathing means you are always the master of yourself. You are the conductor of your own car. You know how to handle yourself in a wonderful way. Even if you become a Buddha you must continue nourishing your body and your mind in a wonderful way. If you leave your conscious breath you can be pulled away by other things. So even if you become a Buddha you continue to practice conscious breathing in order to be in touch with what is wonderful.

"Bhikkhus, the practice of the Full Awareness of Breathing if developed, practised continuously will have great reward and bring great advantages. It is like this; the practitioner goes into the forest or to the foot of the tree or to any deserted place, sits in stability in the lotus position holding his or her body quite straight and practices meditation.

Breathing in I know that I am breathing in; Breathing out I know that I am breathing out.

Breathing in a long breath I know I am breathing in a long breath.

Breathing out a long breath I know I am breathing out a long breath.

Breathing in a short breath I know that I am breathing in a short breath.

Breathing out a short breath I know that I am breathing out a short breath."

This is the second exercise in the Chinese text. There are 16 exercises. In the Pali text there is not the words " I know." So in the Pali text it is:

'Breathing in, I am breathing in.'

'Breathing out, I am breathing out', but this is not part of the first exercise.'

In the Chinese text it differs:

'Breathing in I know I am breathing in.

Breathing out I know I am breathing out', and this is the first exercise.

The second exercise in the Chinese text is:

'Breathing in a long breath or a short breath I know that I am breathing in a long breath or a short breath.

Breathing out a long breath or a short breath I know I am breathing out a long breath or a short breath'.

The Pali text begins straight away with the exercise; 'Breathing in a long breath...'. I think the Chinese text is more logical, it starts more logically;

'Breathing in I know that I am breathing in.

Breathing out I know that I am breathing out'.

The second exercise is:

'I know that my breath is long or short. Breathing out I know that my breath is long or short.

So I want to advise you to look at the exercises to see which part is good for your practice and which is not good. There are those who are not very intelligent in their practice, when they hear the Buddha teach; 'Breathing in a very long breath-' they then force themselves to have a long breath in order to be faithful to the words given in the exercises by the Buddha. Throughout your day you are forgetful and you are not aware that you are breathing. And therefore the first exercise is to bring you mind to your breath.

'Breathing in I know that I am breathing in'. I am not thinking of something else. 'Breathing out I know I am breathing out' . This is the first exercise to bring our mind back to our breath.

The second exercise is to recognise whether the breath is long or short. You respect your breath as it naturally is, whether it is a long or a short breath.

'Breathing in I am aware that I have a long breath.

Breathing out I am aware that I have a long breath'.

So the second exercise is to recognise what kind of breath you have.

In the first exercise you recognise a very simple and miraculous thing. You bring your mind back to your body and to your breathing. You suddenly see, "Oh, I am breathing in, I am breathing out". Just recognise and identify with your breathing.

When you are breathing in you know that you are breathing in. Breathing out you know you are breathing out.

You only need to use one word; 'In' or 'Out'. Your attention is fully with the length of your breathing. Your mind can be thinking of many things so to help focus your attention you can say "In" for the whole of your in breath, saying "in, in, in, ...". As long as your mind is totally with the in breath as you are saying this, this is fine. By saying "....I know that I am...", the word "know" means you bring all your attention and all your mind to the In and Out breath. Because you bring all your attention to your breath you let go of all worries, anger, craving, since your all the attention of your mind is totally with the breathing. So jealousy, fear, anger disappears. Mindfulness is like a guard who keeps watch at the gates of a fortress. The guard sees when a citizen leaves or enters the fortress, he knows whether it is a local or a stranger. He recognises "This is a citizen." or "This is a stranger." Mindfulness is the guard who knows

that you are breathing In, knows that you are breathing Out . Your mind knows whether something is a good energy, or it knows whether it is bad energy. Later on when the practice is more developed you recognise "That is jealousy, that is compassion", but first you train your mind to recognise your breathing. So the first exercise is 'To Know', like the guard who takes care of the fortress of the city. Know you are making an In breath, know that you are making an Out breath.

There are those who put their hand on their abdomen and all attention is brought to the abdomen. My abdomen is rising, my abdomen is falling;

'Abdomen rising.

Abdomen falling'.

Because you are concentrating your attention on the rising and falling of your abdomen all other thinking stops. When you receive very agitated news and you cannot sleep you might take a tranquilliser pill to help your problem, but this harms even more your body and feeds your addiction. The best way is if you are agitated and you cannot sleep, to bring all your attention to the rising and falling of your abdomen. By focusing all your mind on the rise and fall of your abdomen you allow your brain to rest. You allow the agitation, the irritation to rest. Because you only focus your attention on the rising and falling of your abdomen for 5, 10, 15 minutes you can enter into a deep sleep.

Sometimes we have, what we call in Vietnamese 'That niem" meaning "The 7 Suffering" and "Bat Dao" meaning "8 things which pushes you to the edge". 7 destructive causes and 8 destructive energies which drives you totally lost. When you are like that your savior would be to go back to your breathing-- know that you are breathing in ---know you are breathing out. Know that as you are breathing in your abdomen is rising. Know that as you are breathing out your abdomen is falling. Your mind is focusing on the in breath and the out breath-- the rising and the falling of the abdomen and your brain has a chance to rest. The 7 destructive causes and the 8 destructive energies that carried you away will disappear.

The object of your mind is your breath. Sometimes the object of your mind could be the blue sky, it could be your heart. The object of your mind could be compassion, or it could be your jealousies. But with this practice the object of your mind is just your in breath and your out breath. In some exercises you focus your attention of your feeling for example, of jealousy, or fear, but with this first exercise you only focus attention on your in and out breath. Then the second exercise is to observe and see whether your breath is long or short. Just know the length of your breath. Don't think a long breath is better than the short breath or a short breath is better than a long breath. You only notice the length of your breath as it naturally is. Sometimes you have a short breath but you feel better than to have long breaths, like after exerting a lot of energy running you naturally need to take shorter breaths because this would feel more better than if you force yourself to take long breaths. Sometimes you might lay down and take very long deep breaths, this is fine. A long breath is fine, a short breath is fine, and it depends on what is better for your body and mind at that moment.

There are some practitioners who want to bend and twist their breathing the way they think it ought to be. The Buddha said that is not the correct way. You only be aware of your breath and do not try to intervene. You don't need to do anything, just know. You just observe, you do not need to suppress, you do not need to force. You just be with your breath in awareness. When there is sunshine it just shines across the land and it doesn't try to spread its rays everywhere or force the land to absorb its rays. The sun just shines. We too practice in a very non-violent, very loving way with our breathing. When you are sitting with a bent back you just recognise your back is bent and quite naturally your body adjusts itself to become a little straighter. There is no forcing. If you are agitated but you are mindful of this feeling of agitation you simply recognise "I have irritation". You should not say "Irritation is very bad, I have to get rid of my irritation". No, you just be aware of your irritation. The teaching of the Buddha is non-violent. If there is irritation you simply recognise you have irritation. You allow irritation to be there and embrace it as if it is a baby. You do not judge, you do not force, and you do not condemn them. You only look at your irritation with compassion. I go back to my body with non-violence, with care, with compassion. When the sunshine falls on the vegetation, the vegetation itself becomes green. When your mindfulness is shining upon what is happening in you then you do not need to force but you know right away and you smile with compassion to your irritation and then your irritation will disappear. You know that everything changes

including your irritation. If you are aware then your irritation becomes weaker, but if you are not aware then the irritation can grow very fast turning into anger and stress, and other negative feelings. If you are aware it will weaken naturally because it is impermanent.

So the second exercise is to recognise whether your breathing is short, long, or in-between. You also see whether it is fast or slow. If your breathing is slow and smooth you can observe it like a tiny stream of water that runs on the sand. If however your breath is more jumpy, you also just observe it as it is and recognise that it is jumping, just observe it without interfering.

The third exercise is to be aware of my whole body as I am breathing. Breathing in I am aware of the air going into and filling my lungs. I can feel the expanding and contracting of my diaphragm. I feel my breathing is touching all parts of my body. Breathing is connected to the movements of the body but in Buddhism it is also a part of the mind. When you are walking you are aware of your every step. When you raise your hand you pay attention to the raising of your hand. If you are attentive to your breathing as you are raising your hand your breathing is the link between your body and your mind. If you follow your breathing you can unite body and mind for maybe 5 to 10 minutes, or longer, but if you are not aware of your breathing your mind tends to wander. A good practitioner always try to bring body and mind together with the help of conscious breathing. When your body and your mind are together you can look deeply. If your mind is far away chasing after thoughts it is hard for you to have concentration. Without concentration you see things in a superficial way. So the third exercise is to bring full awareness to your whole body.

There are some dharma teachers in the past who explained this exercise as "I am aware of the whole body by my breath". I don't think that this is correct. I think that many teachers in Sri Lanka still believe this third exercise is to be aware of 'the whole body of the breath'. I believe that in this exercise the 'body' is our entire body, not just the 'breath body', "I am aware of my whole body".

I am aware of my whole body. I think even the well-known teacher Buddhadasa teach this exercise as to be aware of the 'breath body'. I also disagree with him because he is really repeating the second exercise which is already being aware of the length of the breath - 'the breath body'. The Buddha has already taught in the second exercise to be aware of the length of the breathing, to be aware whether it is long or short. And the Buddha's teachings is very concise. Therefore in this exercise it is to be aware of the whole of your body and not just the breath body.

'Carya' means body and nowadays many teachers in Sri Lanka explain this as the breath-body. They are caught by the idea that in order to go into deep concentration we must not be aware of the whole body because if you are aware of the whole body the concentration object is too wide, you see your liver, your heart....They think you cannot be deeply concentrated so they are caught by this idea and thus explain the body in this exercise as the body of the breath. But, the Buddha does not need for us to become very concentrated in a world outside of our body and mind and the body and mind of people around us. Because these teachers think the concentration field will be too large. They think we would be caught by the heart, the liver, and so on ....so they do not practice awareness of the whole body but just the breath body. But this is a wrong way, many generations have made that mistake. It is very important that you have awareness of your body. Your liver is very important, your heart is important, so are your intestines important for your practice. We have to be at peace, to be a friend with our whole body. Our whole body is not only our breath but our eyes, ears, heart, liver, every part of our body.

We have a tendency to hate our body, and we think the body is the enemy of our spirituality. This is not correct.

"I am breathing in I am aware my whole body. Breathing out I am aware of my whole body".

The fourth exercise is "I am breathing in I calm my whole body. Breathing out I calm my whole body".

The third exercise is the awareness of the body, the fourth is to calm your body. Before you can calm your body you must first be aware of it. Maybe your body is restless, so you follow your breathing and after a while you calm your body. First, you bring your mind to your breathing, secondly you observe to see whether your breath is long or short and when you

merely recognise it your breathing becomes smoother. The third exercise is to be aware of your whole body. You might feel a restlessness in your body, your liver is unwell, your heart is unwell.... So in the fourth exercise you calm your liver, you calm your heart, you calm your eyelids, your eyes, your intestines, you calm every part of your body. If you are a practitioner and if you don't try to calm your body like this, how can you calm your mind? So first, you must be in touch with your body, to calm every part of your body, then, you calm every part of your mind. These third and fourth exercises you can practice when you do sitting meditation. Sometimes our body is very tense, it has no rest at all. We are under stress. We torture our body, we do stressful things and put our body through stressful situations. Sometimes we have so many worries, anxieties, fears, and then our body tenses up, becomes rigid, then we have so many diseases, not a serious disease but many little problems because our mind is not in very good shape this affects our physical body. So first you have to go back to your body. "You are there my little heart. You work so hard. I don't pay attention to you. I smoke too much and cause problems for you. I drink too much and cause a lot of pain to you my heart". You are smiling to your heart. You know that your heart has a hard time. "My poor liver you are there-- I ate too much. I ate a number of unhealthy things and caused a lot of pain for you. I know you are there and I am aware of your presence. I relax you". When you calm yourself you know what to do in order to help, so you release your body -- you calm your body. You calm your eyes, your ears, your nose, your tongue, your heart, your liver, every part of your body. That is the practice. Your liver maybe calling S.O.S, your heart maybe calling S.O.S, because they are suffering. Your kidneys suffers, your intestines suffer.... We practise calming not just through words but we need to truly bring and feel peace in our body, bring peace to our liver, to our heart, to every part of our body.

There will be a 21-day retreat next spring from the 23rd May which will be entirely about this Sutra so you will have 21 days to practise this sutra. It is wonderful, you will find that with this sutra you will become a liberated person. Because this sutra concerns every part of your body and every part of your mind you will see that within 21 days of observations and practise you will be liberated.

Now we go to four exercises concerning our feelings. The fifth exercise is about joy, the sixth is about happiness, and the seventh is about the functioning of our body, our mind and states of mind. 'Giac' means awareness, so the eighth exercise is to calm out state of mind and feeling. 'Hy Giac' means awareness of joy, so the fifth exercise is to be aware of your joy;

"Breathing in I feel joyful. Breathing out I feel joyful.

He or she practices like this".

You can practice this exercise by writing down a list of all the things that bring you joy. "Breathing in I feel joyful" - but don't just say the word you have to feel this joy in you. Breathing in I have no cancer, no hate, I am still very young, I still have good health, I am so lucky to be in touch with the practice. See all the positive things in order to be in touch with your joy.

We can distinguish between joy and happiness. Joy means, for example, if we are stuck in a dessert and we suddenly see in the distance and an oasis, you begin to feel joyful and excited. Because you know soon you will have water to drink. When you get to drink this water your excitement begins to lessen. There is now some peace in your joy because you are now tasting the actual water. You really taste the joy, the happiness is the actual tasting, and it is not the excited joy when you were anticipating the drinking.

In the West people mistake excitement for happiness. Many young people misunderstand and think happiness and joy are the same. They have a lot of excitement but not real happiness. For example, before coming to Plum Village they are excited at the prospect of being here, but when they arrive they don't feel the same excitement and instead want to go to another centre, then there is excitement in this new planning. To be excited is not happiness. We have to live deeply in the present moment in order to be truly happy. When you breathe you have to be joyful and know that you have a lot of conditions for happiness. You have to be in touch with all the conditions of happiness. So you write a list of all the things you have to enjoy all your conditions for happiness.

There is a young lady of 23 who after reading one of Thay's books she felt so much joy. She returned to her breath and was in touch with all the conditions she has; "I am only 23 years

old, I still have my youth, my good health, I have all the conditions to be happy". Even if a person is 60 or 70 years old but knows how to be in touch with his conditions, he says "I have all my maturity and experiences, I am also happy." The sixth exercise is to truly enjoy the wonderful things that you have. You write down all your positive things and feel happy with them and really live.

There are those who spend all day long thinking negative things about himself and others. The more they think the more they get angry, getting frustrated. Therefore the Buddha taught "Nourish yourself with joy and happiness". Write down everything positive available to you. Write down the joy. Live deeply your happiness, so that you will be very strong and go far in your practice. In life there is also pain and hurt but if you balance the negative with your other conditions of happiness, this negative aspect is not enough to cause you suffering. Now you know how to transform. Find ways to transform your difficult situations.

The practice of the fifth and sixth exercises is not for you to go through quickly, you really practice to live your joyful feelings, live concretely the joy and happiness that is around you and in you. Be in touch with your wonderful eyes, I can see the blue sky, I can see the green vegetation, I can hear the singing rain, I can hear the singing of the birds, I can enjoy many things! Use your intelligence to construct your own happiness. There is suffering true, but first return to what is wonderful in life in order to be nourished, then you will be able to look at what is negative with serenity and transform them.

There are those in society who always feel they are sitting on a bed of charcoal. There are many wonderful things around but they are blind to them and feel only the heat of this bed of charcoal.

"Breathing in I feel joyful. I am joyful because I know that there is plenty of chance for me to be happy". I am happy with my eyes, I am happy with my ears, I am happy with my lungs, I am happy with my heart, I am happy with my kidney, I am happy with my strong hand, I am happy with my strong legs, I am happy with many things. "Thien diet phi thuc" means "Use the joy of the practice to be happy". The joy of the practice nourishes you, feeds you. A practitioner who does not know how to feed themselves with joy and happiness cannot go far.

Do you miss meditation? Do you miss joy, joy in deep looking and seeing many happy things in the practice? During meal times I wish that every living being would have joy and happiness from the practice to be their food. While I am eating my food I also wish that others could enjoy the practice as food for joy and happiness. Everyday when you are cooking and preparing food for the Sangha it is the same as when we sit in the meditation hall we are also preparing food for others. It is food for happiness. I am cooking for you now, I try and offer to you the Dharma-- the joy of the Dharma, the joy of the practice so that you can feed yourself and make yourself strong and healthy on your spiritual path.

Meditation is a food, happiness is a food. Joy and happiness should not remain only words, you have to write down the things that makes you happy in order for you to be aware of them. If your sitting meditation is not bringing you peace and joy this means your practice is not yet correct. In sitting meditation you should try to discover many fruits of joy and happiness..

The seventh exercise is to be aware of all your mental states of mind - to be aware of your feelings. We have 51 different states of mind of which in Buddhism we call 'Mental Formations'. In the seventh exercise we practice the awareness of our feelings, using our mindfulness to be in touch with what is happening. If it is a joyful feeling we are aware of this feeling so that we can continue to nourish it. For example if you are eating an orange you are aware of its sweet taste. If while eating the orange you are jealous or angry with someone, the sweet piece of orange is like a phantom because you cannot fully appreciate it. The practice is to just be aware that you are eating an orange. It is very wonderful. You could also be aware of the negative things like when colleagues offer you alcohol and as you drink you realise the damage it maybe causing your liver as well as your mind. With awareness you can begin to know how to refuse that which causes harm to your wellbeing. If you are jealous you can recognise your jealousy and say "My little jealousy I am aware that you are here" without criticising or judging your feeling. So in this exercise you just be aware of your sensations, the sweet piece of orange, your jealousy, the glass of alcohol. If you are not mindful you might drink many glasses, or because of jealousy you could utter very cruel words to someone, without mindfulness you could do many harmful things.

To be aware is easy to say, but it is not an easy practice, so we practice with a community to support one another. In order to help other brothers and sisters to be aware you learn and train yourself to be aware, to be aware of what is going on in your body and your mind.

The eighth exercise is to calm all these feelings. At the mealtime there might be a very delicious dish and you feel excited to eat it, learn to calm this feeling. You become angry when a certain thing happens, calm your anger with awareness. You learn to calm every mental formation, every feeling, whether negative or joyful

When I got hold of this sutra I felt I possessed the most wonderful treasure of humanity. I didn't know what merit I had done in the past that had brought me into contact with this sutra. But you need a teacher to share with you in order to make good use of this sutra. We will continue next Thursday.

(3-bells)



## The Sutra on The Full Awareness Of Breathing.

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Dear Sangha, today is the 22nd of January 1998 and we are in the New Hamlet in our winter retreat. We will continue on the Sutra on The Full Awareness Of Breathing.

We noted that the first four breaths have body as object, the four next have feelings as object. The master Buddhaghosa, the author of the Vasudharmasutta treatise, has said that these 4 have to do with feelings and perceptions. But in fact they are only concerning feelings. Even if feelings are connected to form and perception, we have to say clearly that these four breaths are concerned only with feeling. The five aggregates; form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness, we usually represent as a tangerine with five sections. We noted that form is our body, our feelings can arise from our body or they can arise from our perceptions. Sometimes when we have headache, the headache phenomena belongs to our body, or the stomachache. A headache or a stomachache gives us a feeling, a painful feeling. When we put on warm clothes and we can have enough to eat, we don't have hunger and cold, so we have a pleasant feeling which comes from the body. So looking after the body is looking after having pleasant feelings.

And the same is true with perceptions. If we look after perceptions, we shall reduce our painful feelings which come from perceptions. When we have wrong perceptions, we suffer, and just as our body. So our perceptions are the root of countless feelings: anger, sadness, fear, worry, desires. All come from wrong perceptions. Therefore, from the foundations of wrong perceptions come countless feelings. Therefore, we can say that feelings are related both to body and to perceptions. But they are still feelings. The second four breathings are related to feelings. Feelings are their object. And feelings are related to body and perceptions. But we have to say quite clearly that the object of the second four breathings is feelings. And we can not say as Buddhaghosa (an ancient Buddhist commentator) that the object of the second four breathings are perceptions and feelings. That's because Thay has put 4, 5, 6, 7, he meant to put 5, 6, 7, 8. On the white board.

And the first four breathings relate to the object of body. The first two talk about breathing and three and four talk about our whole body. And we know that the breathing, here, is part of the body's functions... seen as the body's functions. We have to remember that the first breathing 'Breathing in I know I'm breathing in. Breathing out I know I'm breathing out.' 'Breathing in I know this is an in-breath. Breathing out I know this is an out-breath.' And the second breathing, I know whether it's long or whether it's short. 'Breathing in I know whether it's long or it's short. Breathing out I know whether this breath is long or short.' And long and short isn't just an idea or a phrase, it is a reality. Just as long as my breath is, I know it is that long. Just as long as my out-breath is, I know it is that long. Because actually the in-breath can be short and the out-breath can be longer. Especially when we begin to practice our out-breath is usually longer than our in-breath. Therefore the first breath is to recognize that this is an out-breath or an in-breath. The second exercise is to see how long or how short is the in-breath or the out-breath. We don't have to say how many seconds or how many meters long it is, we just have to be aware of it, all throughout its duration. We begin and we are aware of its length, we keep our mind to that breathing the whole time. We begin at the beginning and we keep our mind with the breath the whole time. Like the pen I'm holding represents the breathing and my finger represents mindfulness. So mindfulness has to follow closely the breath from the beginning until the end. If mindfulness half way along becomes separated from the breath, then mindfulness will have another object, it won't be this breathing anymore. Breathing in I know I'm breathing in ... oh, I forgot, I didn't turn out the light in my room. And we lose our breath and we follow the image of the light, which hasn't been switched off. Mindfulness is not following recollections... it's not following the breath, it's following another object and so there isn't any concentration and our mindfulness awareness is not successful. We have to hold closely to the breath the whole time, from the beginning to the end. Then we know that this breath is long, or exactly how long it is. We know, we just know, because we are mindful. ... and when we breathe out, it is the same. We hold closely to our breath until it comes to an end. The practitioner who begins the practice has to grasp firmly... has to master these first two breathings.

There are people who can not do it at first and the teachers will tell them they should count their breathing, one in-breath, one out-breath. Then we count two at the second in-breath and out-breath. So you can say breath 'in one', 'out one', 'in two', 'out two', 'in three', 'out three'. And if we get to ten, then we begin to get back down, go backwards down to 'one' again. People whose minds are very distracted use this way in order to make their mind concentrated. But counting the breath is not mentioned by the Buddha. So let's only talk about being aware of the breath. Sometimes people call this sutra a counting the breath sutra, but that is not correct. Counting the breath is not mentioned in this sutra and the method of counting the breath is one that evolved after the time of the Buddha. As far as the original teachings of the Buddha are concerned, it's not counting the breath but following the breath. And in the spirit of the original Buddhism following the breath is the more correct way of practice than counting the breath. But counting the breath has its benefits for people who just began the practice. Like children, for instance, you can have them count their breath from one to ten. And if they forget what number they got to, half way along, they have to start again from number one. And then go backwards 'ten, nine, eight, seven' and if you forget half way along then you have to go back to ten and start again. When we become less distracted, we can abandon the counting and just follow our breathing. We abandon the counting and continue with following the breath.

The third breathing connected with the body is awareness of the body, of the body formations. 'Breathing in I know I am aware of my whole body.' That is, I am embracing my whole body with my awareness. 'Breathing in I am aware of my whole body.' That is, we embrace our whole body with our awareness, with our mindfulness. The fourth one is calming, pacifying the body formations. 'Breathing in I calm the formations of my body.' Hanh in Vietnamese, formations, means the phenomena of the body. This phenomenon is called the body. In English we say 'formations'. (Thay in English:) 'Breathing in I am aware of my physical formation. Breathing out I calm my physical formation.' Physical formation means our body. Because everything in life has been formed by causes and conditions, like a flower. It's a formation, brought about by elements such as water, fire, earth, seeds, rain, manure. These things come together to make a formation, a phenomenon which we call samskara. This is the body samskara, not the mind samskara. All formations, all phenomena are impermanent. They do not last forever. Therefore it's said that all formations are impermanent. Our body is a formation called the physical formation. And our anger is a formation called a mental formation. All these formations are impermanent. 'Formation' is a classical term, a technical term, a specialist term for Buddhism, meaning a phenomenon. ... kaya samskara means a physical formation. Because samskara also means a collection of many elements and our body is like that. So if we are aware of our physical formation it means I am aware of my body as a phenomenon. It's very good, very interesting. We use the word formation. We see very clearly that the thing we are talking about is a collection of many elements and we see that it is because of this it is constantly in the process of change.

When we get to the fourth breathing we see that our body is pacified, is calmed, we can see that our body is agitated, is trembling. So we put that aside and we calm our body. That is our practice. When we are practicing total relaxation... total relaxation is developed from this fourth breathing which is called 'Calming the physical formation'. What it does for us is to make us feel well, light and leave our stress behind. Usually we practice total relaxation when we are lying down, but these four breathings can be practiced when we are sitting or when we are standing also, not only when we are lying down. When we are lying down it may be easier to practice. But the only problem is that we can fall asleep when we lie down or we are beginning to snore after five minutes. But if we are sitting we are less likely to fall asleep, we can practice maybe half an hour or an hour, we won't feel sleepy. Therefore, when we hear the sound of the bell or hear the sound of a bird singing or see the sun rising, anything which reminds us, we have to depend on that in order to practice these first four breaths: 'Breathing in I know I'm breathing in. Breathing in I know it's long or short. Breathing in and out I am aware of my physical formation. Breathing in and out I calm my physical formation.' Because the sound of the bell, the sound of birds singing are all opportunities for us to return to our breathing. Therefore in the Sukhavati realm, the trees make a wonderful sound when the wind blows in them and that is what tells us about

the different teachings of the Dharma. When we hear the sound of the breeze in the pine trees and we are mindful, we can be aware of our body, we can calm our body and that is hearing Dharma teachings coming from the trees, from the wind and we can be in touch straight away with the Pure Land, the Sukhavati realm. And if we cannot be in touch with the Pure Land now, when we pass away we will not be able to be in touch with it. So the question is not whether we are here or there, the question is can we do it or not.

The fifth breathing is awareness of joy, the sixth is awareness of happiness, the seventh is awareness of the mental formation, meaning the feelings – and we have to remember here that mental formation means just feelings here. The eighth is calming the mental formation, calming the feelings. I'm breathing in and I feel happy, I feel joyful. This is the fruit, the joy of meditation, which nourishes us. A French woman wrote to me. She is thirty-two years old, she says, and she has a small baby and her whole family is practicing together. "I haven't been to Plum Village but I have read the book published by Albin Michel and when I started to practice, I read 'Breathe, you are alive' ... and as soon as I put it into practice, I saw that it was effective. I saw that you only need to breathe to be happy, you only have to be mindful of your breathing and you can be happy. And this is based on my experience, not coming from a book. Whenever she comes back to her breathing she feels happy and wide, because returning to our mindful breathing we are in touch with the conditions of happiness which are present around us. For instance we are young, we have work, we have a house to live in, we have security, we have the blue sky, we have the white clouds and whenever we return like that to our breathing. Thanks that to our breathing, we are in touch with the conditions of happiness which are there.

It shows us quite clearly that when we are aware of joy, which is not a repetition of words, autosuggestion, and we don't say I'm feeling joy when I don't feel joyful – this is real joy! It's the joy of awareness... the awareness which brings us joy. There are so many things for us to be joyful about. So we only have the capacity to recognize that we can be happy, we can be happy. There are people who cannot recognize their capacity to be happy. So they trample on their happiness and they break up their happiness at every moment, because they are not capable to recognize the conditions around them which can make them happy. We wake up, for example, we breathe and we see something wonderful. Ah, I am awake, I am alive! I have twenty-four hours to live. Oh, my mother is here. My mother is still alive or my father is still alive, or the person I love is still alive. I don't have backache... things like this. There are so many of them. And if we haven't got this ... then we have got that. There are only people who are ignorant, who cannot see that we have the conditions for happiness. Only the ignorant think that they only have the conditions for suffering. Therefore, breathing in means to have the opportunity to be in touch with those good fortunes we have, the wonderful conditions we have. And once we are in touch with them we will have joy and then we will have happiness.

Maybe we are obstructed by something and we cannot be in touch with the conditions for happiness. We are obstructed by something which is produced by our own mind. Therefore, there are so many conditions for happiness but we are not able to appreciate any of them. And when that happens we should go to our teacher and our spiritual friends and ask for help to remove that obstruction. 'Breathing in I feel joyful' is a practice which we should do every day. We are already happy and we practice it and we will be happier. And if we are not yet happy and then we practice it in order to begin to be happy. And when we hear the bell, we return to our self and we begin to prepare to breathe in. And when we are breathing in, we make the feeling of joy arise. Breathing in I know that my teacher is alive. I am near to my teacher. And I feel joyful, and I feel happy because of that. Breathing out I am being looked after by the sangha and that makes me feel happy immediately. Breathing in I am beginning a new day with practice and that gives me a feeling of joy and happiness straight away.

[sound of the bell]

And joy gives rise to happiness, leads to happiness. Breathing in, in touch with the conditions of joy, I feel joy. Breathing out I embrace that joy and so in really touching that joy it becomes happiness. First of all we see the water and we are thirsty and we feel joy. Then we can pour the water to drink and drink it. That is happiness. The joy has to lead on to happiness. And this joy and happiness function is to nourish us, not to bring about suffering for us. These are the wholesome joy and happiness, not the joy and happiness of sensual desire, like the joy of sex or the joy of possessions, the joy of food. We hear the sound of the bell, we return to our breathing. We breathe in and with our capacity to be in touch with one of the conditions or many of the conditions of happiness our in-breath gives rise to the feeling of joy. We can nourish that joy as we breathe out or we make the feeling of peace and joy arise as soon as we breathe out. Breathing in we have joy, breathing out we have happiness. Or breathing in we have joy, breathing out we have joy. Breathing in we are happy, breathing out we are happy. So the sound of the bell should bring us both joy and happiness. This is the practice of joy and happiness. It is not autosuggestion. If we just imagine we are happy when we are not happy or imagine we are joyful when we are not joyful that is not the correct practice. When we read these details in the sutra we see that what the Buddha told is nothing... there is nothing weary of life in that. The Buddha taught that joy is real, peace is real, happiness is real and our practice is to nourish us with these things. We practice and we ask our brothers and sisters how they practice. So we can learn from other people's experience and every day our practice will increase, will get better.

We know that joy is a feeling, happiness is a feeling and the feelings here, the mental formations here are also feelings of which we are aware. Breathing in I am aware of the feeling which is present. Breathing in I am aware of the feeling that's now in me, whatever the feeling is, whether it's pleasant, painful or neither pleasant nor painful. It is to recognize the feeling. To recognize the mental formation is to recognize the feeling, the feeling which is in me at the moment. We know that feelings are a river. In our person there are five rivers. The river of the body, the river of the feelings, of the perceptions, of the mental formations and of the consciousness. Our body is a river. It is a formation, which is constantly changing, and each cell in the body is a drop of water and that drop of water is born and dies. Each cell in our body is constantly being born and dying, all cells in our body are constantly being born and dying. So we should learn how to look at our body, as a river which is constantly changing, being born and dying. And we should also learn how to look at our feelings as a river. These feelings arise, they endure and then they disappear. And each feeling is a drop of water in a river of feelings. And the seventh breathing is teaching us to look at the feeling, to recognize the feeling which happens to be present, whatever it is.

And the eighth breathing is to calm that feeling. That feeling, even if it is a feeling of joy, we need to keep it calm. Because in joy there is excitement and we have to calm that excitement. In happiness we can also calm our happiness. And if it is a painful feeling which comes from our worry, our anger, our jealousy, our despair we really need to recognize it and embrace it and this eighth breathing is to make it calm, calm down like a child which has a tummyache. We recognize that this child has a tummyache and we hold the child and we calm the child down. To recognize the feelings and to calm the feelings is the seventh and the eighth breathing. A practitioner has to know how to do this. You shouldn't just wait for these things to kill you. You should not allow your feelings to destroy your body and your mind. A practitioner, whenever they have a feeling, especially a feeling of suffering they should know how to use the energy of mindfulness in order to embrace that feeling, like a mother embraces her baby. And say that, you should say that "I'm here, I'm here. Your mother is here, mother is here. So don't worry. We will look after you. We will embrace your suffering." Don't run away from it. And when you are able to embrace it, you use the method of breathing in and breathing out in order to calm it down. That is called 'Calming the mental formation', calming the feelings in other words. And we remind you one more time: these four breathings are to deal with our feelings, the object is only feelings... of these four breathings.

Now we are going on to the next four breathings, the ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth. These breathings belong to the field of mind. Here we should use the word Than, meaning kayo or body. And here we should use the word mind. Mind means, quite clearly, Mental formations. Feelings are a mental formation. We learn in the Buddhist psychology school that there are fifty-one mental formations and feelings are one of them. Perceptions are another. And we have left after that forty-nine mental formations. Therefore mind here is referring to forty-nine mental formations. You can put fifty-one if you like. It doesn't matter. Because this method can also be used for feelings and perceptions. ... And we will see that the last four breathings, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen and sixteen... their object is phenomena. Dharma, here, means phenomena. So phenomena are one ... perceptions belong to this field. And this field is to deal with our perceptions. Perceptions bring us a lot of suffering. If we can actually transform our perceptions, then we can transform all our suffering. In the mind section we have forty-nine mental formations, in the feeling

section we have one mental formation and in the phenomena section we have one mental formation, mainly perceptions and that makes out fifty-one all together.

In the Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness we have four terms, four fields of mindfulness. Mindfulness of body, feelings, mind and objects of mind. (Thay in English:) 'Contemplation of the body in the body, contemplation of the feelings in the feelings, contemplation of the mind in the mind, contemplation of the objects of the mind in the objects of the mind.' Here, dharma means the objects of mind. All the forty-nine mental formations have that object and technically it is called 'dharma'. Dharmas are the object of perceptions. Dharmas are the object of mind. These four: body, feelings, perceptions and mind include all the five skandhas. So where does consciousness lie? As far as the sixteen breathings are concerned, consciousness, as far as I can see, is the earth which contains and stores all the seeds. And when the seeds manifest they become mental formations, fifty-one mental formations. Forty-nine belong to the mental formations section, one to the feelings and one to the perceptions. So the manifestation of consciousness can be found in three of the skandhas.

Consciousness is like a river. When we see all the drops of water, we can see the river. The manifestation is drops of water. When we can see the fifty-one mental formations, we can already see consciousness. We only meditate on what is manifested, how could we meditate on what is not manifest. So consciousness lies in mental formations, lies in perceptions, lies in the body and lies in feelings. Consciousness is the basis. Consciousness is the capacity to manifest and the other four skandhas are the actual manifestation. So consciousness is the basis of the other four skandhas and if we can see clearly the other four skandhas, then we can see consciousness. These fifty-one mental formations, as far as consciousness is concerned, are seeds. And when they manifest they are mental formations. So there isn't such a thing as consciousness outside of mental formations. Mental formations are consciousness and consciousness is mental formations. The four fields of mindfulness contain the five skandhas. Because all the drops of water in a river are the river. All the mental formations are the consciousness. If we know that we won't expect consciousness to be something different from mental formations. This is a new way of analysis, to help us to be able to see and to be able to bring the five skandhas into the practice of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness and see that they are the same thing, how the four... And if you haven't understood yet, you will understand, so don't worry.

The ninth breathing is gladdening the mind ... which in fact means the mental formations, being aware of the mental formations is the ninth breathing and the tenth one is gladdening the mental formations. The eleventh one is concentrating the mental formations and the twelfth one is liberating the mental formations, liberating the mind. We ought to know that these are expressions, ancient terms, and we need to replace new terms in order to make the meaning clearer. We understand and breathing in ... I am aware of the mental formation which is in me now. And this ninth breathing is different from the seventh breathing. So number seven is just for feelings and nine is for any other mental formation. Breathing in I am aware, I recognize the mental formation which is present in me now. Any mental formation, as long as it isn't feeling or perception. But we can also put feeling and perception in here if we want to. It doesn't really matter. The third river is the river of mental formations. Every wave we could say on the river is a mental formation anger, sadness, jealousy, and hatred. (Thay in English:) 'Breathing in I am aware of the mental formation that is in me.' That is we have to recognize and embrace it. And the tenth breathing is gladdening the mind. How can you make a mental formation in you more joyful? How can you make positive, wholesome mental formations arise?

This circular diagram symbolizes that inner store consciousness. If we draw a circle and we make it in two and what is underneath is store consciousness and what is on top is the mind consciousness. We know that the store stores all the seeds. When these seeds manifest they become a mental formation. Mental formation is the manifestation of the seed. When a seed manifests as a mental formation we need to be aware of it. And that is the fourth breathing. How do we practice the tenth? How can we make good mental formations appear in our mind consciousness? We have good seeds in us. How can we catch them and help them manifest? That is what is meant by gladdening the mind. You have the seed of joy, of happiness, of love, of forgiveness... and these good seeds have been handed down to us by our parents, by our teachers, by our patriarchs. And every day we help them to grow bigger and in this tenth breathing we try and touch them and allow them to manifest. Make them manifest as a mental formation. Because if we just let the seeds of sadness manifest and they will drown... they will take the whole space in our mind consciousness... and we won't have room in our mind consciousness for gladness.

Whenever we put on a nun's robe or monk's robe, we remember that we are a monk or a nun and we see that this life is beautiful and a happy life. And we can bring happiness to others as well and then our bodhicitta is naturally watered and touched. And we gladden our mind. We put our hand on our head and we feel our shaved head, we know that we are a monk or a nun. We see a younger brother or sister, when we are reciting the sutra, we feel glad. So there are many, many opportunities to be in touch with the good seeds in us. The seed of bodhicitta, the seed of love. And when just two or three good seeds manifest in our mind consciousness, we will have gladness. This is a practice we do every day. And we have to help these flowers to bloom, many times every day. That is gladdening the mind. And when those flowers have opened in our mind, our eyes open like flowers, our hands open like flowers and our steps are like flowers.

Yesterday in the Dharma discussion I said... in the hermitage there is a camellia tree and it's very beautiful. Now has it opened twelve flowers, very beautiful, very wonderful flowers. I have planted that camellia tree years ago. First it just had two flowers and they died very quickly because the plant wasn't used to being here. It hadn't put down many roots. The next year there were many buds but only a few flowers and they died quickly. But last year there were twelve flowers and they lasted a long time. When I look at that camellia tree, it's like a monk or a nun. In the first year they may not have put down their roots, so they don't get many flowers. In the second year it's better and in the third year they put down strong roots and are used to the customs of being a nun and give many, many beautiful flowers. All monks and nuns are like that. They all have fruits and flowers. If you practice properly, the flowers will open all the time not only in the spring. We can look at a monk or a nun and we can see them opening flowers every day. These flowers will bring happiness to many people. If you have confidence, if you have diligence, if you have mindfulness, if you have concentration, if you have wisdom, if you have happiness, if you have liberation when you think about the Buddha and Buddhism, you see you have a place of refuge. Whenever you look at the sangha, you feel joy and therefore you gladden your mind. Gladness manifests many times a day. So when walking, standing, talking, laughing is opening flowers for themselves and blooming flowers for others too. Some people open many flowers and some people's plants bloom with only a few. We should not feel inferior because we only have a few flowers. We know when we only have a few flowers, that all we need to do is to make our roots more strongly rooted in the soil and then quite naturally there will be more flowers and we will be able to help others and our own country. The duty of a monk or a nun is to bloom with flowers for the world.

That is the practice of gladdening the mind. When we see that that is what we are doing. As far as the camellia is concerned if it has not yet produced flowers we should be patient. We have to look after that camellia better, more. We should not blame, we should not be angry. Because a camellia will bloom. That is just because it hasn't managed to put down its roots yet that it hasn't. It's not the right time yet for it ... that it hasn't given flowers. All of us must practice to help that. The earth must help that camellia to have the strength to bloom. Everyone has to help the plant to bloom.

[sound of the bell]

And when we come as far as this, we see the meaning of the four right efforts, the four skillful means of diligence. Diligence is one of the paramitas, one of the six paramitas. The first right effort is: the unwholesome seeds which have not yet manifested, do not let them manifest. When the unwholesome seeds have manifested, how do we help them to return to seed-form as soon as possible? For example, we hear some music that waters negative emotions in us, or we look at a film, which has violence, hatred and craving in it, we are helping the unwholesome seeds in us to arise. If we don't look at that kind of film, we do not listen to that kind of music, we help the seeds not to manifest. That is the first right effort: do not allow to manifest unwholesome seeds which have not yet manifested. The second thing is: the unwholesome seeds which have manifested, help them to go back to their seed-form. Do not allow them to remain a long time in your mind consciousness. How do we do that? We have the precepts, we have the Fine Manners, we have the Dharma doors of sitting and walking and reading the sutra. Those are the ways to help the

unwholesome seeds to go back to their seed-form. Because the longer they stay in mind consciousness, the stronger they will become in store consciousness ... their root will become.

So we don't use the method of oppression, but we use the method of changing the peg. We take hold of our breathing, we invite a good seed to come into the mind consciousness. And when the good seed is already in our consciousness, the unwholesome seed will go back down. We can read some words in the sutra or we can read something our teacher or the Buddha has left for us. That will help us transform these things that have already manifested. The third thing is: the good seeds which have not yet manifested, how can we help them to manifest. That is the object of the tenth breath. Every day we have to allow these good seeds to sprout, as if it is the spring. And sometimes we will see a new flower... one flower... And then in the evening we see another flower. In the spring it's like that, the flowers are always coming up. That is why we call it spring. It means that the flowers are springing up from the earth. And we have to practice in such a way that we can allow the Dharma rain to fall on the seeds and the wholesome seeds will constantly be manifesting. So the third right effort is: the wholesome seeds which have not yet manifested, to help them manifest. The fourth right effort is: once the wholesome seeds have manifested, keep them as long as you can in the conscious mind. Don't allow them straight away to go back into seed-form. Because the longer you keep the wholesome seeds in the conscious mind, the stronger their roots will become. For instance, if you are planting tulips or onions, the longer the leaves and the flowers exist above the earth, the stronger the bulb becomes under the earth. Once the bulb is strong, then the flowers will easily appear. So the four right efforts, we can understand in terms of the tenth breathing. The eleventh breathing is to concentrate the mind. Concentrating the mind means: the mental formation which is present, we need take mindfulness in order to embrace it and keep it alive for a time. When there is mindfulness, there will be concentration. When we continue to embrace a mental formation with mindfulness, then we already, naturally, have concentration. Whether it happens to be a negative or a positive mental formation, and if we can embrace it for a time, we will quite naturally be able to look deeply into its basis, its nature. And when we look into its nature we have wisdom or insight. Concentration here is the beginning of insight. (Thay in English:) 'Breathing in I concentrate on the mental formation that is in me.' Breathing in I embrace the mental formation in me with the energy of mindfulness and concentration. I do not run away from it. I take it as an object, just as a researcher is aware of the object of his research or like a student doing mathematics exercise allows his concentration to embrace the mathematics. If we watch the television and try to do the mathematics at the same time, we will not be successful. We haven't got enough mindfulness and concentration to do the work. We have to put ourselves into a situation of concentration in order to be able to look in our mental formation of anxiety, sadness, jealousy, loneliness... And these things make us suffer. So we need to embrace them. Because we have the opposite tendency. We see that this is not comfortable and so we want to run away from it. But here we embrace it. We are determined. We are going to work with it. We have to use mindfulness and concentration to embrace it. If we don't embrace it, look into it, there is not way we can be liberated from it. In Vietnam there is a teacher, he is quite intelligent, but his life is not happy. He has an obstruction. He is intelligent, he has studied a great deal, he has many people who respect and love him, but he has been taught in an idea and he can not let go of it. He thinks that he is the best teacher. And he cannot bear the thought that there is a teacher who is better than him. And that idea has reasons for it. Because even when he was a baby novice, people praised him as being very intelligent. And when he was in the middle school, he was the top of the class and he was extraordinary. He passed his degree with extraordinary merit or something... Many people praised him as the best and that is what has destroyed him. Gradually the idea that he is the best, nobody is as good as him, has become an obstacle. He cannot accept the idea anybody could be better than him. So he is suffering. Now he has become an upadaya but he is still suffering. He has jealousy, irritation, because the idea that he is better than others is the root of his suffering. And he cannot see that. From the outside we see it so easily that he only has to give up the idea that he is the best. He is like everybody else. He doesn't have to be number one. But as far as he is concerned, it's very difficult. Because he doesn't have the courage to look and see that this is the root of his suffering... thinking that he is number one. And we can see quite clearly that all he has to do is let go of that idea that he is the best. He doesn't have to be number one, he can just be like everyone else and he would be happy. But his whole life he has not been able to do that, to let go of that idea. And in us... there are monks and nuns among us who are not quoting that idea, who can see that I am a nun among other nuns, I am a monk among other monks, I don't have to be any special and therefore we are very happy, easily happy. Concentrating the mind means practicing to embrace the mental formation, so we can look deeply at it. And when we can look into it and recognize it and see it is the root of our suffering, then we can let go of it and we will be liberated. That is what is meant by liberating the mind. Breathing in I am liberating, releasing my mental formation, I'm breathing out and I'm releasing my mental formation. Because my mental formation is a rope binding me... maybe the rope of craving, maybe the rope of hatred, maybe the rope of suspicion, maybe the rope of pride. These are ropes which bind us, bind our body and our mind, make our life unhappy. When we can look deeply at them and embrace them and undo them, then we have the happiness called liberating the mind. Liberating the mind means, I am able to undo, as I breathe in, the mental formations... I can liberate them by undoing the rope which they are. Mental formation, here, is an affliction. For instance ... our younger sister is always talking to Thay about us, to Thay, telling tales... younger brother is always telling tales about me, I never tell tales about him. This makes us suffer. We make ourselves suffer by having that thought. So we have to sit down and we have to undo that rope which is binding us. And then our mind will be liberated. We have to call our mental formations by their name. We have to call it craving, we have to call it pride, suspicion, wrong view... These are all the unwholesome mental formations such as listed in the list. So we do not allow these unwholesome mental formations to be ropes binding us. We have to look deeply at them, by recognizing them and then we will be concentrated on them and then we feel that we are liberated from them. We know that these four breathings concerned with the mental formations of the mind are very important. We shouldn't say 'oh yes I can do that'. There is much more to learn about them. There are forty-nine mental formations and it is a large practice for us to do. Whenever one of them arises, we should be able to qualify its name and we have to bear what discovers ... the causes for its arising. This monk I talked about in Vietnam, who thinks he's the best, is not fortunate because he was too successful too young and people were taken in by his capacity and they worshiped him like a god. And that is what destroyed him, made him think that he is number one... and therefore he's suffering. He cannot accept that anybody can be better than him. And he is a Buddhist. How can you think that a Buddhist could be like that, because Buddhists are not meant to have an idea of self. Even though he is an upadaya. Even if he makes miracles... he can perform miracles, he won't be successful in his practice. Because you should be able to be happy whether you're number ten... you don't have to be number one (because we're ten...). These twelve breathings have to be developed. We have to practice and we have to present our experience of the practice to others and help people who come after us know how to practice. These sixteen breathings are to help us... need to be developed. Breathing in I am aware of the mental formation which is present in me. I recognize it, simply recognize it, saying here is, you are called craving and I know you. (Thay in English:) '... craving, I know it. Hello, good morning.' The second breathing, if it is suspicion, you say... (Thay in English:) 'Hello there, I know you are the mental formation called suspicion. ... I know you. You are an old friend of mine... and laugh...' I have known you for a long time... that is recognizing the mental formation. And you should know how to recognize. Whenever you have a mental formation you should say hello to it. Don't allow it to come and go without being recognized, it's very important. Number ten is gladdening our mind. That is allowing the seeds of happiness arise every day, nourish them by Dharma talks, by practice, by walking meditation, by breathing, by reading the sutra... These are wholesome seeds and they need to manifest every day. Number eleven is that I concentrate on my mental formation. I've recognized it, but I don't allow it to go. I sit with it, I embrace it and I concentrate on it. (Thay in English:) 'Breathing in I focus my awareness and attention on my mental formation, I embrace dearly, I embrace deeply the mental formation that is in me.' And if there is concentration, there will follow, naturally, liberation. (Thay in English:) 'Breathing in I am liberating myself from this mental formation. Breathing out I am transforming this mental formation in order to liberate myself.' This is not something vague, up in the sky, under the earth. It's not a matter of prayer, this is a matter of practice, daily practice.' Now let's go on to the four breathings concerned with the dharmas, perceptions. We are able to destroy the wrong perceptions with the last four breathings. These four last breathings are connected with the third skandha, the skandha of perceptions. This is the first time I have talked about the four last breathings in forms of perception, the skandha of perception. The thirteenth breathing is awareness of impermanence. We have a number of ignorances. We have a number of blocks of ignorance. We think that things are always there. We think our body is permanent, our mind is permanent. We act as if we are going to be here for millions of years, we're eternal. We have heard the Buddha teach, we have heard our teacher tell us about impermanence, we have read the sutra about impermanence, we have intelligence and we know that the very most we can live is a hundred years. But we only know that superficially, only accept that superficially. But deep down there is something which always thinks that we will live forever, we are indestructible. That person, we think, has had a car accident, that person is in a hospital, that person has cancer, that person has died. But we don't think that it's us. We have that kind of foolishness. Therefore our insight into impermanence is

very superficial. We just see it as an idea, as a theory. And then we act in our daily life as if we were going always to be there... and our friends and our brothers and sisters are always there, Plum Village is always there, Thay is always there. But that isn't true. It's not like that. Our life is like a flash of lightning, like clouds in the sky... So we have to concentrate, we have to look deeply into impermanence, to see with every step and every breath, every mouthful of food... in terms of impermanence. And the impermanence, here, is not negative, is not pessimistic ... it's the truth and we have to understand it deeply. It also means no self. Because impermanence is essential for life. If things are not impermanent, there will be no life. For example, we want to plant sunflowers. If the sunflowers are to grow, there has to be impermanence. Because if we sow the seed of a sunflower and the sunflower seed is to stay the seed the whole time, there will be no sunflower. But the sunflower seed has to disappear in order to become the flower... that is impermanence. And the sunflower has to grow old and die in order for there to be seeds for the new sunflowers. It's very necessary for life. Don't say 'I don't like impermanence'. Because if you don't like impermanence, you don't like life. So therefore, don't think that impermanence is negative, is pessimistic, it is the basis of life. And impermanence means no self, because as far as time is concerned, we talk about impermanence and as far as space is concerned, we talk about no self. 'No self' is just another word for impermanence at least in the spatial element. It's the same thing. As far as time is concerned it's called impermanence, as far as space is concerned it's called 'no self'. Because there is nothing that can continue to be the same for two seconds. We breathe in and we breathe out, and we are different than we were before. When we breathe in, we are bringing so many different elements into ourselves. And the seeds are for carbon dioxide and oxygen, that you breathe out, other people will breathe in. That is the body breath. As far as other things are concerned it's the same. We inter-are. We are always affecting each other, we are always transmitting things to each other with every moment. And there is nothing that continues to be the same as it was two seconds ago. So impermanence means 'no self'. Nothing is definite, everything is changing. Impermanence and 'no self' are two aspects of life. And if you can see impermanence and 'no self', you can see interbeing and you can see emptiness and then, afterwards, you will have insight, you will have awakening and you will have peace. Because you have been able to look deeply into impermanence. And because you don't really know what impermanence is, you complain about it like the gatha which says "angry with someone in the ultimate dimension". We don't want to look at the other person we are angry with, we want to punish the other person. But according to this gatha we have to close our eyes and breathe and ask ourselves: 'Three hundred years from now, where will I be and where will you be.' And we see how foolish we are to be angry and want to blame that person, we want to open our arms and embrace that person, because the other person's presence is so precious in the present moment. Thanks to seeing impermanence, angry with each other in the ultimate, then mentions 'I close my eyes and look deeply, three hundred years from now, where will I be and where will you be?' That is the fruit of looking into impermanence: see we know that tomorrow we don't know whether we will still be here and therefore we want to do something today to make the other person happy. We cannot wait until tomorrow. Have you heard the story about going on a picnic? There was one monk and his disciple, they lived together and the disciple said: 'Teacher, why don't we go for a picnic on the hill?'

The disciple really wanted to go on a picnic with his teacher, but his teacher was terribly busy, I don't know why he was so busy but he was. And therefore the disciple said, "how can we have enough time to go on a picnic together?" The teacher said, "Yes I'm sure there will be, but after two months." But after six months they still hadn't been on a picnic, and several years later they still had not been on a picnic, and the disciple gave up. He said, "My teacher is always busy, he's either on the telephone, or driving the car, or sending us fax, he is always doing something". One day the two had to go out to the town together and there was a traffic jam, the teacher said, "disciple why don't you go faster?" and the disciple said, "Oh!, because there's a traffic jam, they're all going on a picnic." Because their whole life they have been so busy and now they have the opportunity to go on a picnic so they are doing that. So the reason why the teacher was unable to go on a picnic was because he wasn't able to see the impermanence of life.

The novices in the New Hamlet go on a picnic every Monday, I think it is very intelligent, because they're not waiting. So if it is possible, we should go on a picnic every day, every hour, to be happy. Whatever we can do to make ourselves happy and to make the people we love happy we should do today, and that is the insight into impermanence, and that gives us the capacity to live and to practice diligently to be liberated. Impermanence gives us the capacity to be able to let go, and once we let go we feel light, we feel liberated. The insight into impermanence gives us hope because nothing is always going to be like that, everything can be changed. Therefore the insight into impermanence is very important, the insight into impermanence leads to the insight into no-self, which leads to the insight into interbeing. And that can take us into the Avatamsaka realm, and we can live in the light, the world of no birth and no death.

The fourteenth breathing: Breathing in I am looking deeply into the 'not-worthy of being desired' nature of all dharmas, this is called 'viraga', not having attachment and desire for something. We should know that things are the objects of our perceptions, this board is the object of our perception, this plant is the object of our perception, and all these objects, these dharmas, are impermanent. That bait is something we are running after, but it is not worthy of our desire. We are ignorant and therefore we think that that bait is the object of our desire. We have to look deeply, carefully, into the nature of that object in order to see that it is not worthy of our running after it. This means 'the nature of not being worthy of our desire', we have to understand this breathing. When we throw down some bait into the river we know that in that bait is a hook, and we hope we will deceive the fish. The fish is just like a child, it just wants to eat, so we don't have to take a real bait, we can just make a bait out of plastic, and when we hook this plastic bait onto the hook the naive fish thinks that it's a real worm. If it knew how to look into the non-desirable nature of things, it would see the hook lying in the bait, and it would see the nature of 'not being worthy of being desired', not being worthy of being run after.

That is how we have to translate this breathing, it is not talking about our mind, it's talking about the things outside our mind, they're not worth desiring. The Buddha said there are five kinds of sensual desire, the desire for possessions and money, sex, fame, and good food. I don't know how many of us have suffered because of our desire for tasty food, we eat something because it tastes good, but we suffer a lot from it afterwards. We suffer because we swallow these four kinds of bait, and when we are suffering so much we begin to see that these things and were not worthy of our desire. The Buddha teaches us in the Sutras, he gave many examples about sensual desire, for example sensual desire is like a torch that we hold against the wind, the flame blows back and burns us. It is like a bone without flesh, which the dogs gnaws day and night, but gets no nourishment from it. The Buddha gave many examples like that for us to be able to see that the bait is not worthy of our desire, we suffer because we run after it. After we have looked deeply into impermanence we can look deeply into the non-desirable nature of the things we desire, because they bring hardship and suffering with them. So we have to be determined not to run after them. The Buddha said there was someone very thirsty and they went into a room and saw some pink water which smelled very fragrant, and somebody said, "Don't drink that, you will die if you drink it." The other person said, "If you just take a little lime juice then it will help you, but don't drink the pink water. But the person drinks the pink water and then they die, and this is the hardship, the misfortune, of desire. We have to see that these five sensual objects are not worthy of being run after. We have to keep reminding ourselves using the words of the Sutras and the reminders of the Sangha. If we live on our own without Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha we will easily lose ourselves on the path of running after the five sensual desires.

We should ask people who have suffered from running after the five sensual desires, to tell us about their suffering. It is a very good way to do it, because people suffer a great deal because of their attachment to the five sensual desires. We should ask them to come and talk to us about these things. If you haven't yet stepped into that realm of suffering you think that this is a good place to go, so you should ask someone who has been there to tell you about it. Often there are meditation students who come to Plum Village who have suffered greatly because of sense desires. We only have to listen to their suffering and their running after the happiness of sense desires, and we will be able to look deeply and feel very happy that we have not yet stepped into that realm.

The fifteenth breathing: I am breathing and looking into the no birth, no death nature of all dharmas, nirodha also means nirvana, means no birth and no death. So now we have gone deep into the subject of our meditation, once we have understood impermanence and the non-desirable nature of things then we come to nirodha, that is the silencing, the extinction, of birth and death. In the beginning we see that things are born and they die, they have a beginning and they have an end, they have a being and a non-being. But because we can look deeply into impermanence and no-self we can discover the ultimate dimension

where there is no birth and no death. At first we see the leaf is born and dies, it is and it is not, and if we look deeply into impermanence and no-self we can be in touch with the no birth and no death nature of the leaf. We see the leaf is like a Buddha, indeed it is not born and it does not die, it does not exist and it does not fail to exist, and we are the same, we also participate in the no birth, no death realm. The greatest duty of a monk, a nun, or a practitioner, is to go beyond the world of birth and death and participate in the world of no birth and no death. Because birth and death are just ideas of birth and death, the Heart Sutra teaches us that there is no birth and no death, nothing defiled and nothing immaculate. This is one of the Sutras that can help us go beyond the ideas of 'is' and 'is not', so that we can be in touch with the ultimate dimension where there is not the many and the one, and that is that world of nirvana, that is the aim of our practice to see no birth and no death. We have opened the door of no birth and no death, no coming and no going, we have opened the door of the ultimate dimension, and we are unshakable and free. Therefore the fifteenth breathing is to help us step into world of the ultimate dimension, and then we can go beyond birth and death. Therefore the Sutra on mindfulness of breathing takes us very far. There are people who despise me saying I just teach breathing in and breathing out. But in fact breathing in and out according to the Anapanna Sutra takes us a very long way. When they see in every retreat I just teach people how to breathe in and breathe out, they look down on me and they say, "Well he doesn't teach anything deep and wonderful, he just teaches breathing in and breathing out."

The sixteenth breathing. : Breathing in and contemplating letting go, releasing. Master Tang Hoi talks about the action of the hearer. If you cannot let go you cannot be liberated, you let go of your ideas about birth, about death, about exists and does not exist. Whatever ideas are making you suffer, you have to let go of them and then you won't suffer. Like the teacher who thinks he is number one, he just has to let go of that and he will be happy straight away. We have a suspicion, but if we can let go of our suspicion we will be happy straight away. We have the idea that this body is me, and if we can let go of that we will stop fearing straight away. We have an idea that 70 years is our life span, and if we can let go of that we will become deathless. We think that we have a separate self, our happiness is not the happiness of the other, and the happiness of the other is not our happiness. That idea of self stops us from being happy, we have to let go of ideas of self, of human being, of living being, and of life span. If we can let go of those ideas we can let go of everything, because if we are caught in any idea we will not be happy, and once we let go of that idea we will be happy. Whether that idea is the idea of success or the idea of happiness, look again into your own mind, have you ideas about success - you want to be like this, like that, you think that you will be happy when you get that decree or when you marry that person. You have to be number one to be happy, you will die because of ideas like that, . So take that idea of happiness away, embrace it and look deeply into it, and you know that when you can let go of that idea you will be happy.

Master Tang Hoi said that there are two things we have to let go of in order to be liberated; that is the idea of this body, that this body is me, and the idea of a life span, this is the length of life I'll have. We have to let go of those two ideas. They both lay in the Vajracchedika Sutra, the first is this body is me, many of us are caught in this idea, this body is me. If you look at this leaf, it says 'this body is me', it does not know that it is already existing in the tree. The leaf is a very small part of it, and sooner or later the leaf will become part of the tree. It looks beautiful and we want to press it in a book, but the book will be destroyed and so will the leaf, and the leaf will go back to the tree. 'This body is me', that is called the body of view. The body view, that means we see that this body is me, once we can give up that idea we will be happy, we will not be afraid. This stage of life is me and I was born in 19 so and so, and I will die in 2000 so and so, and I just exist for that amount of time, that is the idea of a life span. We cannot see ourselves before that or after that, that is ignorance, we have to let go of that idea of life span. That is why Master Tang Hoi said that we have to let go of the idea of body and life span. So the sixteenth breathing is very powerful practice of letting go of ideas, as soon as you can let go of your ideas you can be happy and secure.

This leaf is the skeleton of a bodhi leaf, I don't know if when the leaf sees it's skeleton it's afraid, but I think that it is very beautiful, so that is why I pressed it in a book. We have a skeleton like the leaf does and our skeleton can be beautiful too, so we have to look deeply in order to see that our skeleton is like the leaf, why are we so afraid when we see a skeleton? So I said to the brothers and sisters, "Please go and buy a skeleton, which we can hang up in the meditation hall, and we can come and join our palms before it and say "Hello skeleton". We have to see our own skeleton at the same time, we should be able to look at the skeleton and feel as normal and happy as we do when we look at the skeleton of this leaf, why do we discriminate? We are like the leaf, the leaf has a skeleton and we have a skeleton, why can't we look at the skeleton of a human being the way we look at the skeleton of a leaf. So please have one hanging up in your room as well, so when you wake up in the morning you will see the skeleton and you will get used to it, and it will finish your ignorance about skeletons. If you are living in a room with a skeleton hanging up day and night, what will be left for you to be afraid of. You've got a skeleton in yourself already, so why are you afraid of a skeleton outside yourself, it's very strange? So the reality is that we have a block of ignorance, and we have to educate that block of ignorance. Our practice is to look at our skeleton, whether it is the present skeleton or the future skeleton, in the same way that we look at a leaf. A leaf falls very gracefully and our life is like that too, the time when we change our body into another form. We have to see our skeleton is as beautiful as the leaf skeleton and there's nothing to be terrified of or afraid of. Has anyone ordered a skeleton yet? Please order one so we can hang it up in the meditation hall, and anyone who wants to borrow the skeleton and hang up in his or her room will be able to.

"So if the method of mindfulness of breathing is practiced in this way, according to these instructions it will be rewarding and of great benefit." I have translated it from Chinese, so you can compare the Chinese version which is in the Samyukta Agama with the Pali version. The order of the 16 breathings in the Chinese version is rather different from that of the Pali version, because #14 is letting go rather than #16. I think it is more correct in the Chinese, because to have letting go before you have the awareness of birthlessness and deathlessness is better. So you should all have a copy of the Chinese as well as the Pali in order to compare them.

In May we will have a retreat of 21 days in North America. In those twenty-one days we will just study the Sutra on mindfulness of breathing, and in that retreat we will go deeper because we have 21 days, whereas here we only have two or three dharma talks, and next Sunday we will finish talking about this Sutra.

Anyone here who has been a teacher in a French school will probably know where we can order a skeleton.

# Going to the Shore of Non-suffering

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Good morning, my dear friends. Today is the thirteenth of August, 1997, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We still have one *paramita* to learn.

Paramita means perfection, the perfection of the crossing over to the other shore. We have seen that a paramita is not so difficult to practice; even children can do it. Paramita means from this shore of suffering we cross over to the other shore, the shore of well-being. From the shore of anger, we cross to the shore of non-anger. From the shore of jealousy, we cross over to the shore of non-jealousy. If you know how to do it, you can cross over to the other shore very quickly. It is a matter of training, it is a matter of practice, and you can do that with the help of another person or many other persons. It's nice to cross the stream of suffering together, hand in hand. So every time you want to cross, if you feel that alone it would be a little bit too difficult, you ask someone to hold your hand and you cross together the stream of suffering with him or with her.

If you feel you are caught in anger and that anger is a kind of fire burning you, you don't want that; you don't want to stay on this shore suffering from anger—you want to get relief, you want to cross to the other shore. You have to do something. Row your boat to go to the other side. Whether that is walking meditation, mindful breathing, or anything that you have learned here from Plum Village, it can be a boat helping you to cross over to the other shore. Next time when you feel that you don't like it on this shore, you have to make a determination to cross to the other shore. You may like to say to a person that you love that you don't want to stay here on this shore, you want to cross over to the other shore, and you may like to ask the other person to help you to cross. There are many things we can do together. Sitting and listening to the bell—we can do together, as two brothers, two sisters, as mother and child, or father and child. We can sit down and practice together.

I know a young mother who has a little boy of four years old, and every time the boy is agitated, not calm, not happy, she will take his hand and ask him to sit down and practice breathing in and out with her. She told her child to think of the abdomen, the belly, and breathing in seeing the belly expanding, rising, and breathing out seeing the belly falling. They practice breathing together like that

three or four or five times, and they always feel better. If the mother left her baby alone to breathe, it would be a little bit difficult for him because he is so young, he cannot do it alone. That is why the mother sits next to him, and holds his hand, and promises to practice breathing in and out together. I have seen that, I have seen the mother and the child practicing in front of me. Because one day I had tea with them—the little boy wanted to have tea with me—so I offered him some tea, and we had a nice time together. Suddenly there was something, he became unhappy and agitated, so his mother asked him to practice that in front of me, and both did very well. So mother has to learn to practice with her child. Father also has to learn to practice with his child. This is a very good habit, a very good tradition, a husband has to learn to do it his wife, a partner has to learn to do it with her partner.

Every time there is one of us who is not happy, we have to help him, to help her, to go to the other shore. We have to support him, support her. We shall not say, “That is your problem,” no. There is no such thing as your problem; it is a problem for everyone. If one person suffers, then everyone around has to suffer too. If a father tells his son or his daughter, “That is your problem,” that means the father has not got the insight. There is no such thing as your problem, because you are my son, you are my daughter, and if you have a problem, that is our problem, not yours only. Because if happiness is not an individual matter, suffering also is not an individual matter. You have to help and support each other to cross the river of suffering. So next time when you feel unhappy, you cry, you don't want to be unhappy, then you may like to ask your father, your mother, your brothers, and your sisters to help. “Please help. I don't want to stay on this shore. I want to cross over.” Then they come and they will help you. He, she will help you.

You should know the practice. We should know how to practice walking meditation, to practice sitting and breathing in and out with our attention focused on our belly. We can invite the bell, to listen together. Every time you feel unhappy or angry, always you can practice listening to the bell. I guarantee that after having practiced three sounds of the bell, you will feel much better.

That is why it would be very helpful for each family to have a bell, a small bell, at least. I don't know whether they have small bells available in the shops, but I think that a bell is very useful. That is why children who come to Plum Village, they are always taught how to invite a bell. If we use a bell, then the whole family has to practice together. It's not possible that one person practices the bell and all the others talk and don't practice. We have to make an agreement within the family that every time there is a sound of the bell, everyone will have to stop—not only stop talking but stop thinking—and begin to breathe in and breathe



out mindfully. Your breathing will become deeper, slower, and more harmonious after several seconds. You know you are crossing while you breathe in and out mindfully and listen to the bell. You are actually crossing the stream of suffering. Maybe in Chinatown you can find a bell somewhere, and I think that Plum Village has to arrange so that there are bells in the shop, so that everyone in the family can get one.

I propose that in each home, each family, there be a bell, and I propose that we arrange so that in each house there is one place to practice listening to the bell and breathing in and breathing out. In our house, there are rooms for everything. There is a room for guests, there is a room for playing, there is a room for eating, there is a room for sitting, for everything. Now, as a civilized family, we have to invent another room. I call it the breathing room. Or you might like to call it the practice room, or meditation room—a room that is for the restoration of peace, of joy, of stability. It is very important. You have a very beautiful room for television, and you don't have a room for your own peace, your own joy, your own stability. That's a pity. No matter how poor we are, we have to arrange so that we have a small place, a room in our family, to take refuge in every time we suffer. That room represents the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. When you step into that room, you are protected by mindfulness, by the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Children have to take care of that room. Because according to the practice, once they get into that room, no one can shout at them any more, including parents, because that is the territory of peace. You can take refuge in that, and no one can shout at you and chase after you any more. It is like the compound of an embassy. The compound of an embassy belongs to the territory of that country, and no one can invade that.

That is why in each home we should have such a room, very sacred. You should not use that room for other purposes. You should not go into that room to play chess, to play the radio, to do other things. That room is just for the practice of breathing, of listening to the bell, of sitting meditation, of listening to the dharma talks, dharma discussions. That room should be only for peace, for the restoration of peace and joy. When you know that there is someone in the room practicing, you should respect that, and not make a lot of noise. You know when you drive through a zone where there is a hospital, you know that many sick people are in the hospital and they need quiet—that is why you don't blow the horn, you don't make a lot of noise. The same thing is true when you know that there is someone in a meditation hall, in the breathing room; you should try not to make noise in the house. If mother is in the meditation room, then you should turn off your phonograph or your television. This is a very good practice.

Every time you get angry, you get upset, you suffer, you know that you need the breathing room. So you think of the breathing room, and as soon as you begin to think of the breathing room, you feel already a little bit better; you know what to do. You don't accept to stay there without doing anything, just to be a victim of your anger, of your suffering. That is why you slowly stand up, you breathe in, breathe out mindfully, and you begin to walk in the direction of the breathing room. "Breathing in, I make one step, breathing out, I make one step." When people see you doing like that, they will have a lot of respect: "This person, although she is very young, she knows how to take care of her anger and her suffering." Everyone will be looking at you with respect, and they will stop laughing and talking loudly; they might follow their breathing to support you. That is the practice. Mother and father—who have received the teaching, who know what it is like to be in anger, who know how to practice when they get angry—mother and father will stop talking and breathe in and breathe out and follow you with their eyes, until you open the door and enter inside. Holding the knob of the door, you breathe in; pulling the door, you breathe out; and you go into it and you close the door behind you peacefully. You bow to the flower in the room—because it would be wonderful to keep one flower alive in that meditation hall, any kind of flower. That flower represents something fresh, beautiful, the Buddha inside of us.

You don't need a lot of things in that breathing room. You need only a pot of flowers—if you have a nice drawing of the Buddha, you can put that—otherwise, one pot of flowers, that will be enough. And one bell, one small bell. I trust that when you go home you will try your best to set up that important room within your home. And you bow to the flower, you just sit down. Maybe you have a cushion—a child should have his or her own cushion—and you need a cushion that fits you, where you can sit beautifully and with stability for five or ten minutes. Then you practice holding the bell in the palm of your hand, you practice breathing in, breathing out, as you have been instructed, and then you invite the bell, and you practice breathing in and breathing out. You practice listening to the bell and breathing in and out several times until your anger and your suffering are calmed down. If you enjoy it, you may like to stay there longer.

You are doing something very important—you are making the living Dharma present in your home. Because the living Dharma is not a Dharma talk. A Dharma talk may not be a living Dharma, but what you are doing—walking peacefully, breathing mindfully, crossing the river of anger—that is a real Dharma and you, it is you who are practicing, who are crossing, so you inspire a lot of respect. Even your parents have to respect you because you embody the

Dharma, the living Dharma. And I will be very proud of you. If I see you, I will know that you are doing so.

I know of a family in Switzerland, a family of seven or eight brothers and sisters, a very big family, and they spent time in Plum Village, they learned about these things, and one day while they were home they got into a kind of dispute. Usually one month or two after coming back from Plum Village, you can still keep the atmosphere of peace alive. But beyond three months, you begin to lose your practice. You become less and less mindful, and you begin to quarrel with each other. So that day, everyone in the family was talking at the same time—all the brothers and sisters except one, the youngest. She suffered, she didn't know why all the brothers and sisters quarreled and suffered at the same time, so it was she who remembered that the bell is needed. So she stood up and reached for the bell, she breathed in and breathed out, and she invited the bell, and suddenly mindfulness came back. Everyone stopped shouting at once, everyone was breathing in and out, and after that everyone burst out laughing, and laughing, and laughing, and made peace with each other. That was thanks to the youngest member of the family. I think she was five at that time. Now she is fourteen, and she is here now today.

[Bell]

If you are an adult, you can practice like that, like your child. Every time you get angry at your husband, at your wife, at your brother, or at your child, you can do like that. Instead of arguing and shouting, you stand up, you breathe in and out, and you practice walking meditation to your breathing room. Your child will see it, your husband, your wife, will see it. They will have respect for you, they know that you are able to handle your anger, to take care of yourself, to love yourself. They will stop what they have been doing, and they may begin to practice.

When you are in the breathing room, inviting the bell, listening to the bell deeply, and practicing breathing, one of your children may like to join you. So while breathing, you may hear the sound of the door opening smoothly. You know that someone in the family is joining you; that may be your child that may be your husband or your wife. You feel much better that you are not practicing as an individual any longer, but you are practicing as a Sangha. That will warm up your heart, as you feel that someone is sitting close to you and beginning to breathe in and breathe out—this is wonderful. Maybe the person—the person who made you angry—after a few moments, feels that he will have to join you in practice. Then you hear the door opening again, and there, he's coming and sitting close to you, and you are flanked by the two people you love the most in the world, practicing breathing in and out. There is no one to take a picture of all

of you, but that is the most beautiful picture that could be taken of the family. Maybe you do not have any lipstick or powder on your face, you do not wear the best dress, but there you are in the most beautiful state of being, because all of you know how to practice. All of you embody the living Dharma at this moment. This is something we have to learn—this is a good habit, it's a good tradition, and you are truly the sons and the daughters of the Buddha.

I would like to transmit to the young people today something that they may use in the future. That is a cake. But this cake is not visible now. If it happens that your mother and your father get into a dispute—that happens from time to time—and you don't like these moments, the tension in the family, the disagreements between your father and your mother. The tension is coming up, one of them said something not very nice to the other, and you suffer. It is like the sky just before a storm. It is a heavy, oppressive atmosphere and a child always suffers in such a condition. I have been a child, and I did suffer when the atmosphere in the family was heavy and oppressive like that. But you know that you should not continue to be a victim because it's not healthy to stay long in such an atmosphere. You should do something. There are children who try to run away, but their apartment is too small and they are on the fifth floor. There is no garden around. So they could not get away.

Many children choose to go into the bathroom and lock the door to avoid the tension and heavy atmosphere in the family. Unfortunately, even in the bathroom the atmosphere was still felt. It's not healthy to be in such an atmosphere. Father and mother do not want to make their child suffer, but they cannot help it—they get into a tension, a conflict. In that moment, I would suggest that you do this: you pull the dress of your mother and you say, “Mommy, it seems that there is a cake in the refrigerator.” Just do that; this is another mantra that I am transmitting to you. Whether there is a cake or there is no cake in the refrigerator, you just open your mouth, after having breathed in and out three times, and you say, “Mommy, there is a cake in the refrigerator.” Just say that.

It may happen that there is a cake. Your mother will say, “That's true. Why don't you bring some chairs to the backyard? I will make some coffee and bring the cake down for you and for your daddy.” She will say that, and she will take the excuse to withdraw to the kitchen. Because she also wants to cross to the other shore; she doesn't want to stay there forever and get destroyed. But if there is no pretext, it would be impolite, provocative, to just leave like that. So you help her. You say, “Mommy, it seems that there is a cake in the refrigerator,” and she will know, she is intelligent, she knows what you mean. You mean that you don't want this to continue. Then when you hear your mother say this, you say “Yes!”

and you run, you run away. You run to the backyard, you arrange some chairs and you clean the table back there. Your Mommy will go into the kitchen, she will boil some water for tea, she will ask you to come and help bring the cake to the backyard and so on. Both of you are doing these things and practicing mindful breathing together. It is very nice, and I will be very proud of you both. You know that you can do it. Please.

Then your father, left alone in the living room, he has seen that, and he has been in Plum Village, so he knows that his wife and his child are practicing. He feels ashamed if he doesn't practice. So he stays there and practices breathing in and out also. He may join you in the backyard with the cake, and the three of you will be over to the other shore in just ten minutes. Don't worry if there is no cake in the refrigerator because your mommy is very talented. She can always fix something.

So this is a cake that I want to transmit to you today, a cake that never disappears. This kind of cake is forever. This is one way of practicing paramita—crossing over. There are many Dharma doors. Dharma doors mean methods of practice. The breathing room is one Dharma door, a wonderful Dharma door. In the next century that's coming in two years, I want to see in every home a breathing room, a sign of civilization. If you are a writer, if you are an artist, if you are a reporter, if you are a novelist, if you are a filmmaker, please help. If you are an educator, a Dharma teacher, please help. In every home, there will be a breathing room for us to take care of our nerves, of our peace, of our joy. We cannot be without a breathing room. So the breathing room is one Dharma door that we have to open to the new century, and the cake is also a Dharma door.

When you hear the bell, please stand up and bow to the Sangha before you go out.

[Bell]

The last pebble, we call it *virya* paramita: the continued growth, the continued transformation. We know that when we cook potatoes, we have to keep the pot covered and should not take the lid off because the heat might get out. Also, we have to keep the fire on underneath. If we turn the fire off, then the potatoes could not cook. After five minutes, if we turn the fire out, then we cannot expect the potatoes to cook, even if we turn on the fire for another five minutes, and we turn it off. That is why there should be continued progress, continued practice, the continuation, the steady practice—that is called *virya*.

In terms of consciousness, we know that there are seeds to be watered and there are seeds to be transformed, and if we can continue to water the positive seeds and to refrain from watering the negative seeds, instead we know how to transform them—that is the process of continued transformation. Let us visualize our consciousness. This circle represents our consciousness, and the lower part is called “store consciousness” (*alayavijñāna*) and the upper part is called “mind consciousness” (*manovijñāna*). [Thay draws a diagram.] We know that in our store consciousness there are all kinds of seeds, positive and negative, buried here, and there are something like 51 categories of seeds. If it is a negative seed, the practice consists in preventing it from manifesting itself in the upper part of consciousness. You recognize that there is a negative seed in you and you would not like it to be watered, because if it is watered then it will have a chance to manifest itself in the upper level of your consciousness and it will become a mental formation.

Suppose this is a seed of anger. As far as it accepts to stay still in the store consciousness, you can survive, you are fine, you can smile, you can be joyful, you can even be happy with the seed of anger in you, with the condition that it accepts to stay still. But if someone comes and waters it, touches it, or you yourself water it, then it will manifest itself on the level of mind consciousness. And there is a zone of energy called anger, and it makes the whole scenery unpleasant. It may stay here for some time, maybe for a few minutes, sometimes a half hour, sometimes the whole day, and the more it stays, the more you suffer. And the more it is here, manifested, the stronger it becomes at the base. So if you allow it to manifest, you get two disadvantages. The first is that you suffer up here, and the second is that it grows bigger here. That is why the practice of virya consists in not giving it a chance to manifest.

So if you love yourself, if you care for yourself, you have to arrange so that you will be protected, you will not touch it and water it, and you ask your friends not to water it. “My dear, if you really love me, don’t water that negative seed in me. You know I have that weakness; I have that seed in me. If you water that seed in me, I will suffer and you will suffer too.” So if we love each other, we should know each other, we should know the negative seeds in each other, and we should practice so that we do not water them every day. This is the practice of virya. We should plead with the people around us. “Dear people, you know me, you know my weakness, you know these seeds in me. So, please, if you love me, if you do care for me, please refrain, please do your best to protect me and not to touch, to water these seeds in me.” We have to sign a peace treaty. We don’t practice alone, we practice with a Sangha, with the people we love, also.

If it has already manifested, then we should know the ways to embrace it and to help it go back as soon as possible to the store consciousness. Because the sooner it goes back, the better you can feel; because here you don't have to suffer long, and down here it doesn't have a chance to grow too big. That is the first meaning of virya. The negative should not be encouraged to manifest. And if it has manifested, do whatever you can to take care of it and to have it go back down here as soon as possible.

Third, the good seeds. Please do whatever you can in order for them to manifest as wholesome mental formations. If you know how to love yourself, to take care of yourself, then please look and realize that you have good seeds in you, seeds that have been transmitted by your ancestors, your teachers, your friends. You do whatever you can to allow them a chance to manifest. Because mind consciousness is like a living room, and you would like to invite into your living room only the pleasant people. With a beautiful pleasant person in your living room, you know it is very pleasant, you enjoy it. So don't allow your living room to be visited by unpleasant people. Invite only beautiful people, pleasant people to be there. That is the third practice of virya. You do that by yourself. You have all the seeds of happiness in here. You have a poem, you have a song, you have a thought, you have a practice, and every time you touch that, you invite it to the upper level of your consciousness and then you feel wonderful, and you keep it in your mind consciousness as long as possible.

Your mind is like a television set, or rather, it is like a computer with many hard disks down here. This is the screen of your computer; you can invite whatever you have down here up there. Selective invitation that is your practice. You invite only the things that are pleasant. Sometimes the pleasant things are buried down here under many layers of unpleasant things, so you need to help, so that you can take these jewels up to the screen. Leave them up as long as you can, keep them as long as you can, in the upper level of your consciousness. A piece of music, a poem, a happy souvenir, the seed of love, the seed of compassion, the seed of joy—all these positive seeds in you should be recognized and should be touched, should be invited. You ask the people around you, the ones who share your life, "Please my darling, please my friends, if you really love me, really want to help me, please recognize the positive seeds in me and please help these seeds to be touched, to be watered every day." That is the practice of love. To love means to practice selective watering of the seeds within the other person and within yourself.

Whatever good, pleasant seed is manifested here, we try our best to keep it as long as we can. Why? Because if it stays long in here, at the base it will grow. This is the teaching in the *abhidharma*, the Buddhist psychology. Buddhist

psychology speaks of consciousness in terms of seeds. *Bija* is a seed and we have all kinds of seeds within our store consciousness. Store consciousness is sometimes called the totality of the seeds (*savabijaka*). Seeds transform into mental formations. Unwholesome seeds are born here in the mind consciousness as unwholesome mental formations. Wholesome seeds are manifested as wholesome mental formations.

So take care of your living room. Take good care of the screen of your computer and do not allow the negative things to come up. And allow, invite, the positive things to come up and keep them as long as you can. There will be a transformation at the base if you know how to do it. This is the virya paramita: continued practice, continued growth, continued transformation—it should be the same.

[Bell]

Now we should go back to other paramitas. [Thay writes on board.] First is *dana* (giving). Second is *prajña* (insight). This is *shila* (precepts or mindfulness training). This is *dhyana* (meditation), consisting of stopping and looking deeply. And this is *ksanti*, translated in Plum Village as inclusiveness. If you only participated in one of the four weeks in Plum Village, you may like to listen to other dharma talks in order to understand, to have a clearer and deeper understanding of the other five paramitas. We have been showing the nature of inter-being between the six paramitas. If you practice one of the paramitas deeply, you practice all six. You cannot understand one paramita unless you understand all the other five.

So continued practice here means that you continue to practice giving; you continue to practice the mindfulness trainings, you continue to practice inclusiveness (embracing whatever there is), continue to practice stopping, calming, and looking deeply. And you continue to practice understanding. All five are the contents of the sixth. And this is true of all of the paramitas. We have used Dana paramita as an example, because understanding is a gift, a great gift. To be able to stop, to calm, and to look deeply is a great gift. To continue your practice is a great gift. To practice embracing everything, including what you may think to be unpleasant in the beginning, that is also a gift. Living according to the five mindfulness trainings is also a great gift. So you cannot practice giving unless you practice the five other paramitas. And this can be applied with all the paramitas, the inter-being of the six paramitas.

In the beginning, I told the children that you don't need money at all to practice Dana. You offer your freshness, you offer your presence, you offer your stability,



your solidity, your freedom. That's a lot already. And these things can be cultivated by the practice of the other paramitas.

All the six paramitas have the power to carry us over to the other shore so that we will not suffer anymore. After some time, training yourself, you'll arrive at the state of being when you can cross the stream of suffering very easily and very quickly. You have to master the practice, and you are no longer afraid. It is like knowing how to make tofu. If you know that there is no longer any tofu in the house, you are not afraid. A few hours and then you have tofu again. You know how to garden, to practice organic gardening. You know that there are heaps of garbage in your garden. You are not afraid because you know how to transform the garbage back into compost, and you are not afraid at all. While transforming the garbage into the compost, you can be very joyful. Therefore, we are no longer afraid of the garbage in us, the afflictions, the suffering in us. We know how to handle them, how to transform them; therefore, crossing to the other shore is a joy. You don't have to suffer even while crossing. You don't think that only when you arrive at the other shore you stop suffering, no. Crossing is already a pleasure.

It's like a child, when she knows that there is a breathing room, she stands up, and she practices walking meditation to the breathing room, and she already feels better because she knows the way, she knows what to do. So if you train yourself in the six paramitas, they will become a habit, a tradition, a routine; and every time you want to cross, you just cross, and not making a lot of effort, you just cross. It's like how you walk, you practice walking meditation. And you will not suffer any setbacks. You train yourself until you arrive at the state of being called the state of no setbacks, always progressing, not backsliding. That is the meaning of virya. You have mastered the techniques, the ways. That is why you never go back to the state of utmost suffering in which you were caught before.

Life is a continuation of transformation; it's just like gardening. You cannot expect that your garden will only produce flowers—your garden does produce garbage. That is the meaning of life. Those who suffer don't know the art of transformation—that is why they suffer, because of the garbage in them—they don't know how to transform. But you, you know the art of transformation; that is why you can embrace even your suffering, and you are able to transform. You never get back to the state of being overwhelmed, not knowing what to do with your suffering. If you train yourself in the six paramitas, one day you will feel that you are no longer afraid of any suffering. It's like doing the dishes. Of course, every day you have to use dishes, you have to eat, and therefore you produce dirty dishes. But for us, making dishes clean is very easy. We have detergent, we have water, we have soap, we have the time, we know how to

breathe in, breathe out, how to sing while doing the dishes. So doing the dishes is no longer a problem. It can be very joyful. So you don't suffer a setback any more, just because you know the way, you know the paramitas, you have the boats to cross over to the shore.

In the bell there are a few questions that I have not answered. The newest questions that I have are these two. "Thay, why don't I feel that I love myself? I am unable to love myself." That is one question. And the other question is: "Without anger, without hate, how could I have the energy to work for social justice? How could you really love your enemy? If you love your enemy, what kind of energy is left for you to step up your struggle. If you accept your enemies as they are and then you do nothing?" So these two questions, I think they are linked to each other. And I think that the elements of the answers to these questions have already been offered in the Dharma talks. But we need to work with ourselves, we have to practice mindful breathing, mindful walking, looking deeply, and recognize all the seeds in order to see the true nature of inter-being, then we could understand the real answers to these questions—not only as theory, but also as practice.

"Why don't I love myself? Why is it so difficult for me to love myself?" The question can be answered by yourself, if you look into what you call "love," what you call "self." You have an idea of love, an idea of self that is very vague. If you look deeply into what you call love, if you look deeply into what you call self, then you will not feel that way anymore. Self is made of what? Of non-self elements. Looking into yourself deeply, you can see all the non-self elements within you.

When I look into my store consciousness, I see the seed of hate, the seed of fear, the seed of jealousy, but I also can see the seed of generosity, the seed of compassion, the seed of understanding. So these seeds must be opposing each other, fighting each other within me, like good and evil fighting, the angel and the beast. They are always fighting within me. How could I have peace at all? It seems that you have something in you that you are not ready to accept. There is a judge in you, that is a seed, and there is a criminal that is being judged in you, and both are not working together in you. So there is a deep division in you, a deep sense of duality within yourself, and that is why you feel that you are alienated from yourself. You cannot love yourself, you cannot accept yourself. But if you know how to look at things in the light of inter-being, you know that everything is linked to everything else and the garbage can always serve as the food for the growth of the flower.

The other day I said that while walking in the Upper Hamlet, enjoying so much the flowers, the vegetation, the beauty, I came to a place where I saw there was some excrement left by a dog or something like that. I told the children I did not mind because I have a great trust in the earth. Earth is great, earth has a big power of transformation, and I know that earth will be able to transform the dirty things into nutritive elements soon for the vegetation. So I still continued to smile, and I didn't mind at all. I saw the inter-being nature of the two things, the flower and the excrement. Looking in one, I saw the other.

The same thing is true with garbage and flower, afflictions and compassion and happiness. All mental formations in us are of an organic nature. If we know how to take care, to embrace, we will be able to transform and we will make the afflictions into the kind of nutriment that will grow, that will help my wisdom, my understanding, my love, my compassion, to grow. If you have that kind of insight into yourself, that both garbage and flowers inter-are, you would be able to accept the negative things in you in the way an organic gardener would be able to accept the garbage in her garden, because she knows that she needs the garbage in order to nourish her flowers. You are no longer caught in the dualistic view, you suffer much less.

Then when you look back, look deeply into your so-called self, you see that your self is made of non-self elements. What you don't like in you, you are not responsible for alone. Your society, your parents, your ancestors are equally responsible. They have transmitted those seeds to you because they have not had a chance to recognize them. They did not have a chance to learn how to transform them, that is why they have transmitted them to you. Now you have an opportunity to recognize them, to learn ways to transform them, and you take the vow to transform them for your sake and for the sake of your ancestors, your parents, your society. That is the vow of a great being, of a bodhisattva.

So if you understand things like that, you will not say, "Why don't I love myself?" It is possible to love yourself. The way offered in Plum Village is very concrete, how to love yourself. Your self, first of all, is made of your body. You love yourself by the way you eat, you drink, you rest, you relax. You don't love yourself because you don't practice these things, you don't allow your body to rest. You force your body to consume the things that destroy it. So how to love your body, it is written down very clearly in the teaching of Plum Village: mindfully eating, mindfully consuming, mindfully allowing your body to rest and to restore itself. When we come to Plum Village, we have to learn these things. Sometimes you don't love yourself, you destroy yourself, and yet you don't know. The Buddha said that there are people who think that they are the lovers of themselves, but in fact they are enemies of themselves. They are doing

harmful things to themselves, they are destroying themselves, and yet they think that they are loving themselves. They destroy themselves with their lack of mindfulness in eating, in drinking, in dealing with their body, with their feelings, with their consciousness.

When you have a feeling—pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral—do you know how to recognize it? Do you know how to embrace it? To calm it? That is the process of loving. When you come to Plum Village, you have to learn these methods of recognizing, accepting, calming, and transforming. To love means to practice—to practice looking, seeing, understanding, and transforming. When you love yourself like that, you love other people also. You love your ancestors, you love your parents, you love your children and their children, and you love us all by taking good care of yourself and loving yourself. Because you are made of us. Your self is made of non-self elements, including ancestors, clouds, sky, river, forest, and us.

You may say, “I want to love myself, but I don't feel that I can love myself.” If you understand the teaching, if you can look into yourself and the nature of love, you see that love is a process of practice. Unless you practice, according to the teaching, you are not loving yourself at all, and not loving yourself, you cannot love anyone. Because self-love is at the same time the love for others. The moment when you know how to breathe in mindfully and smile, you make yourself feel better and you make the person in front of you, behind you, feel better also.

As far as hate is concerned, it is the same. You say that there is a lot of social injustice and other people are doing evil things to destroy themselves, to destroy you, to destroy the world, and it feels good to be angry at them. But who are they, who are you? You feel that you have to do something to help the world, to help society, but who is the world, who is the society?

When you see delinquent children, caught in drugs, in violence, and locked up in prisons, do you think that you should hate them or you should love them? You should take care of them. Why do they behave like that? Why do they look for drugs? Why do they have recourse to violence? Why do they oppose their parents, their society? There must be reasons why they do so. One day they may kill you, they may use a gun and shoot you down, they may burn your car. Of course, you can get angry at them, you can fight them, and if you have a gun you might like to shoot them down before they shoot you. But that doesn't prevent them from being the victims of society, of their education, of their ancestors, because they have not been well taken care of. Punishing them would not help

them; there must be another way to help them. Killing them would not help them.

There was a sea pirate who raped a small girl of twelve years old on a refugee boat. Her father tried to intervene, and they threw her father into the ocean and he drowned. After the girl was raped, she was so ashamed, she suffered so much —also because of the death of her father—she jumped into the ocean and drowned.

That kind of tragedy took place almost every day when there were boat people. There was not a day when we did not receive news like that in the office of the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation in Paris during the war. I remember the morning when I read the report about that girl, I did not eat my breakfast, I went into the woods. I practiced walking meditation, embracing the trees, and so on. Because I felt I was being raped and I was one with that child. I was angry at first. But I knew that I had to take good care of myself, because if I let the anger overwhelm me, make me paralyzed, then I could not go on with the work I should do, the work of peace and taking care of the victims of the war. Because at that time, at the office of the Buddhist Peace Delegation in Paris, we took care of providing the delegations in the peace talks with real information, trying to stop the war, and trying to relieve the suffering of war victims, including orphans and so on. At that time we were able to get support for more than 8,000 war orphans to continue to live and to go to school. So we could not afford to be paralyzed by such news that came every day into the office, so we had to practice together. Without mindful breathing, mindful walking, and renewing ourselves, how could we go on with our work when we were flooded with information like that about the war?

That night in sitting meditation, I saw myself born in a fishing village along the coast of Thailand, because I was meditating on the sea pirate. I saw myself as born in the family of a poor fisherman, and my father was very poor. My mother also was very poor. Poverty had been there for many generations. My father got drunk every night because the work was so hard and he earned so little, and he beat me every time he got drunk. My mother did not know to read and to write, did not know how to raise a child, and I became a delinquent child, playing with other delinquent children in the village along the coast of Thailand. At the age of 12, I already followed my father to the sea to help him with the fishing. I had seen girls and boys who were dressed in beautiful dress, who went to school in their beautiful automobiles, and I felt that I would never enjoy that kind of life at all.

Now I am a fisherman on my own. I have my fishing boat, and yesterday someone told me that the refugees very often bring with them some gold, and if I just go and take that gold just one time, I will be able to get out of this kind of chronic poverty and that will give me a chance to live like other people. So without understanding, without compassion, just with that kind of aspiration, I agreed to go with him as a sea pirate. When out in the sea I saw the other pirates robbing and raping the girl, I felt these negative seeds in me also come up very strong—there is no policeman around, there is freedom, you can do everything you like here, nobody sees you—so I became a sea pirate, and I raped the twelve-year-old girl, and she jumped into the river. Nobody knows. I have some gold now.

If you are there on the boat and if you have a gun, you can shoot me, I will die. Yes, I will die and that is the end of my life. You shoot me, yes; you can prevent me from raping the girl, yes; but you cannot help me. No one has helped me since the time I was born until I became a 18-year-old fisherman. No one has tried to help me—no educator, no politician, no one has done anything to help me. My family has been locked in the situation of chronic poverty for many hundreds of years. I died, but you did not help me.

In my meditation, I saw the sea pirate. And I saw also that that night along the coast of Thailand, 200-300 babies were born to poor fishermen. I saw very clearly that if no one tried to help them, then in 18 years many of them would become sea pirates. If you were born into the situation of that sea pirate, if I were born into the situation of that pirate, then you and I could become sea pirates in 18 years. So when I was able to see that, compassion began to spring up in my heart, and suddenly I accepted the sea pirate.

You have to do something to help them, otherwise they will become sea pirates. Shooting them is okay, but it does not solve the problem. Locking up the people who use drugs and who do violence is okay, but that is not the best thing to do. There are better things to do. There are things you can do to prevent them from being what they are now, and that is the work of love. In the enemy, you can see the beloved one. That does not mean that I would allow them to continue the crime, the violence, to destroy. I would do whatever I could to prevent them from causing harm, but that does not prevent me from loving them. Compassion is another kind of energy.

You say that anger is a formidable source of energy that pushes you to act. But anger prevents you from being clear in mind, from being clear sighted. Anger cannot give you lucidity, and in anger you can do many wrong things. As parents, we should not teach our children when we are angry. Teaching our

children when we are angry is not the best time. It does not mean that we should not teach them, but we teach them only when we are no longer angry. We don't teach with the energy of anger, we teach only with the energy of love, of compassion. That is true with the sea pirates, with the people who are destroying life. We have to act, but we should not use the energy of anger as fuel. We have to use the energy of sacrifice, the energy of compassion.

Great beings like the Buddha or Jesus Christ, they know the power of compassion, of love. And there are people among us who are ready to suffer, to die, for love. Please don't underestimate the power of compassion, of love. With the energy of compassion in you, you continue to remain lucid and understanding is there. When understanding is there, you will not make a mistake. You are motivated by love, but love is born from understanding.

[Bell]

Many of us are motivated by the desire to do something for social change, for restoring social justice. But many of us get frustrated after a period of time because we don't know how to take care of ourselves. We think that the evil is only in the other side, but we know that the evil is within us. Craving, anger, delusion, jealousy—they are in us. If we don't know how to take care of them, to reduce their importance, to help the positive qualities in us grow, we would not be able to continue our work, and we'll be discouraged very soon, overwhelmed by despair. There are many groups of young people who are strongly motivated by the desire for social action, but because they don't know how to take good care of themselves, they don't know how to live and work with harmony among themselves, they give up the struggle after some time.

That is why it is very important that we take good care of ourselves, and then learn to look at the other people not only as criminals but also as victims. Of course, we should do everything we can to stop them in the course of their destruction. But we should also see that they are to be helped at the same time. We should be able to make it very clear to them that, "If you do this, we will try to stop you by whatever means we feel that we need, but we will do it with love and compassion. We will try to stop you, to prevent you from doing whatever you try to do to us and to your victims, but that does not mean that we are acting with hatred or anger. No, we do that with love. If you know how to go in that direction, we will support you wholeheartedly because it is our desire, our hope, that you move in the direction of harmony, of nondiscrimination, of social equality."

We have to make it very clear, because in that person there is a friend, and there is an enemy in him or in her at the same time. The enemy is the negative seeds, and the friend is the positive seeds. We should not kill the friend in him, we should only kill the enemy in him; and to kill the enemy in him is to recognize the negative seed in him and try to transform it, to not allow the situation to be favorable for the continuation of crime and destruction.

So that is a strategy, because to practice you need a strategy. You need a lot of intelligence, of deep looking, and you also need a lot of compassion and love. In the context of social change, we have to practice together. We have to unite our insights. We have to bring our compassion and insight together in order to succeed. We know that only love, only compassion and understanding, can really bring a change, because hatred cannot be removed by hatred. This is something said by the Buddha in the *Dhammapada*, hatred can never be removed by hatred.

[Bell]

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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## The Sutra on The Full Awareness Of Breathing.

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Dear Sangha, today is the 22nd of January 1998 and we are in the New Hamlet in our winter retreat. We will continue on the Sutra on The Full Awareness Of Breathing.

We noted that the first four breaths have body as object, the four next have feelings as object. The master Buddhaghosa, the author of the Vasudharmasutta treatise, has said that these 4 have to do with feelings and perceptions. But in fact they are only concerning feelings. Even if feelings are connected to form and perception, we have to say clearly that these four breaths are concerned only with feeling. The five aggregates; form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness, we usually represent as a tangerine with five sections. We noted that form is our body, our feelings can arise from our body or they can arise from our perceptions. Sometimes when we have headache, the headache phenomena belongs to our body, or the stomachache. A headache or a stomachache gives us a feeling, a painful feeling. When we put on warm clothes and we can have enough to eat, we don't have hunger and cold, so we have a pleasant feeling which comes from the body. So looking after the body is looking after having pleasant feelings.

And the same is true with perceptions. If we look after perceptions, we shall reduce our painful feelings which come from perceptions. When we have wrong perceptions, we suffer, and just as our body. So our perceptions are the root of countless feelings: anger, sadness, fear, worry, desires. All come from wrong perceptions. Therefore, from the foundations of wrong perceptions come countless feelings. Therefore, we can say that feelings are related both to body and to perceptions. But they are still feelings. The second four breathings are related to feelings. Feelings are their object. And feelings are related to body and perceptions. But we have to say quite clearly that the object of the second four breathings is feelings. And we can not say as Buddhaghosa (an ancient Buddhist commentator) that the object of the second four breathings are perceptions and feelings. That's because Thay has put 4, 5, 6, 7, he meant to put 5, 6, 7, 8. On the white board.

And the first four breathings relate to the object of body. The first two talk about breathing and three and four talk about our whole body. And we know that the breathing, here, is part of the body's functions... seen as the body's functions. We have to remember that the first breathing 'Breathing in I know I'm breathing in. Breathing out I know I'm breathing out.' 'Breathing in I know this is an in-breath. Breathing out I know this is an out-breath.' And the second breathing, I know whether it's long or whether it's short. 'Breathing in I know whether it's long or it's short. Breathing out I know whether this breath is long or short.' And long and short isn't just an idea or a phrase, it is a reality. Just as long as my breath is, I know it is that long. Just as long as my out-breath is, I know it is that long. Because actually the in-breath can be short and the out-breath can be longer. Especially when we begin to practice our out-breath is usually longer than our in-breath. Therefore the first breath is to recognize that this is an out-breath or an in-breath. The second exercise is to see how long or how short is the in-breath or the out-breath. We don't have to say how many seconds or how many meters long it is, we just have to be aware of it, all throughout its duration. We begin and we are aware of its length, we keep our mind to that breathing the whole time. We begin at the beginning and we keep our mind with the breath the whole time. Like the pen I'm holding represents the breathing and my finger represents mindfulness. So mindfulness has to follow closely the breath from the beginning until the end. If mindfulness half way along becomes separated from the breath, then mindfulness will have another object, it won't be this breathing anymore. Breathing in I know I'm breathing in ... oh, I forgot, I didn't turn out the light in my room. And we lose our breath and we follow the image of the light, which hasn't been switched off. Mindfulness is not following recollections... it's not following the breath, it's following another object and so there isn't any concentration and our mindfulness awareness is not successful. We have to hold closely to the breath the whole time, from the beginning to the end. Then we know that this breath is long, or exactly how long it is. We know, we just know, because we are mindful. ... and when we breathe out, it is the same. We hold closely to our breath until it comes to an end. The practitioner who begins the practice has to grasp firmly... has to master these first two breathings.

There are people who can not do it at first and the teachers will tell them they should count their breathing, one in-breath, one out-breath. Then we count two at the second in-breath and out-breath. So you can say breath 'in one', 'out one', 'in two', 'out two', 'in three', 'out three'. And if we get to ten, then we begin to get back down, go backwards down to 'one' again. People whose minds are very distracted use this way in order to make their mind concentrated. But counting the breath is not mentioned by the Buddha. So let's only talk about being aware of the breath. Sometimes people call this sutra a counting the breath sutra, but that is not correct. Counting the breath is not mentioned in this sutra and the method of counting the breath is one that evolved after the time of the Buddha. As far as the original teachings of the Buddha are concerned, it's not counting the breath but following the breath. And in the spirit of the original Buddhism following the breath is the more correct way of practice than counting the breath. But counting the breath has its benefits for people who just began the practice. Like children, for instance, you can have them count their breath from one to ten. And if they forget what number they got to, half way along, they have to start again from number one. And then go backwards 'ten, nine, eight, seven' and if you forget half way along then you have to go back to ten and start again. When we become less distracted, we can abandon the counting and just follow our breathing. We abandon the counting and continue with following the breath.

The third breathing connected with the body is awareness of the body, of the body formations. 'Breathing in I know I am aware of my whole body.' That is, I am embracing my whole body with my awareness. 'Breathing in I am aware of my whole body.' That is, we embrace our whole body with our awareness, with our mindfulness. The fourth one is calming, pacifying the body formations. 'Breathing in I calm the formations of my body.' Hanh in Vietnamese, formations, means the phenomena of the body. This phenomenon is called the body. In English we say 'formations'. (Thay in English:) 'Breathing in I am aware of my physical formation. Breathing out I calm my physical formation.' Physical formation means our body. Because everything in life has been formed by causes and conditions, like a flower. It's a formation, brought about by elements such as water, fire, earth, seeds, rain, manure. These things come together to make a formation, a phenomenon which we call samskara. This is the body samskara, not the mind samskara. All formations, all phenomena are impermanent. They do not last forever. Therefore it's said that all formations are impermanent. Our body is a formation called the physical formation. And our anger is a formation called a mental formation. All these formations are impermanent. 'Formation' is a classical term, a technical term, a specialist term for Buddhism, meaning a phenomenon. ... kaya samskara means a physical formation. Because samskara also means a collection of many elements and our body is like that. So if we are aware of our physical formation it means I am aware of my body as a phenomenon. It's very good, very interesting. We use the word formation. We see very clearly that the thing we are talking about is a collection of many elements and we see that it is because of this it is constantly in the process of change.

When we get to the fourth breathing we see that our body is pacified, is calmed, we can see that our body is agitated, is trembling. So we put that aside and we calm our body. That is our practice. When we are practicing total relaxation... total relaxation is developed from this fourth breathing which is called 'Calming the physical formation'. What it does for us is to make us feel well, light and leave our stress behind. Usually we practice total relaxation when we are lying down, but these four breathings can be practiced when we are sitting or when we are standing also, not only when we are lying down. When we are lying down it may be easier to practice. But the only problem is that we can fall asleep when we lie down or we are beginning to snore after five minutes. But if we are sitting we are less likely to fall asleep, we can practice maybe half an hour or an hour, we won't feel sleepy. Therefore, when we hear the sound of the bell or hear the sound of a bird singing or see the sun rising, anything which reminds us, we have to depend on that in order to practice these first four breaths: 'Breathing in I know I'm breathing in. Breathing in I know it's long or short. Breathing in and out I am aware of my physical formation. Breathing in and out I calm my physical formation.' Because the sound of the bell, the sound of birds singing are all opportunities for us to return to our breathing. Therefore in the Sukhavati realm, the trees make a wonderful sound when the wind blows in them and that is what tells us about

the different teachings of the Dharma. When we hear the sound of the breeze in the pine trees and we are mindful, we can be aware of our body, we can calm our body and that is hearing Dharma teachings coming from the trees, from the wind and we can be in touch straight away with the Pure Land, the Sukhavati realm. And if we cannot be in touch with the Pure Land now, when we pass away we will not be able to be in touch with it. So the question is not whether we are here or there, the question is can we do it or not.

The fifth breathing is awareness of joy, the sixth is awareness of happiness, the seventh is awareness of the mental formation, meaning the feelings – and we have to remember here that mental formation means just feelings here. The eighth is calming the mental formation, calming the feelings. I'm breathing in and I feel happy, I feel joyful. This is the fruit, the joy of meditation, which nourishes us. A French woman wrote to me. She is thirty-two years old, she says, and she has a small baby and her whole family is practicing together. "I haven't been to Plum Village but I have read the book published by Albin Michel and when I started to practice, I read 'Breathe, you are alive' ... and as soon as I put it into practice, I saw that it was effective. I saw that you only need to breathe to be happy, you only have to be mindful of your breathing and you can be happy. And this is based on my experience, not coming from a book. Whenever she comes back to her breathing she feels happy and wide, because returning to our mindful breathing we are in touch with the conditions of happiness which are present around us. For instance we are young, we have work, we have a house to live in, we have security, we have the blue sky, we have the white clouds and whenever we return like that to our breathing. Thanks that to our breathing, we are in touch with the conditions of happiness which are there.

It shows us quite clearly that when we are aware of joy, which is not a repetition of words, autosuggestion, and we don't say I'm feeling joy when I don't feel joyful – this is real joy! It's the joy of awareness... the awareness which brings us joy. There are so many things for us to be joyful about. So we only have the capacity to recognize that we can be happy, we can be happy. There are people who cannot recognize their capacity to be happy. So they trample on their happiness and they break up their happiness at every moment, because they are not capable to recognize the conditions around them which can make them happy. We wake up, for example, we breathe and we see something wonderful. Ah, I am awake, I am alive! I have twenty-four hours to live. Oh, my mother is here. My mother is still alive or my father is still alive, or the person I love is still alive. I don't have backache... things like this. There are so many of them. And if we haven't got this ... then we have got that. There are only people who are ignorant, who cannot see that we have the conditions for happiness. Only the ignorant think that they only have the conditions for suffering. Therefore, breathing in means to have the opportunity to be in touch with those good fortunes we have, the wonderful conditions we have. And once we are in touch with them we will have joy and then we will have happiness.

Maybe we are obstructed by something and we cannot be in touch with the conditions for happiness. We are obstructed by something which is produced by our own mind. Therefore, there are so many conditions for happiness but we are not able to appreciate any of them. And when that happens we should go to our teacher and our spiritual friends and ask for help to remove that obstruction. 'Breathing in I feel joyful' is a practice which we should do every day. We are already happy and we practice it and we will be happier. And if we are not yet happy and then we practice it in order to begin to be happy. And when we hear the bell, we return to our self and we begin to prepare to breathe in. And when we are breathing in, we make the feeling of joy arise. Breathing in I know that my teacher is alive. I am near to my teacher. And I feel joyful, and I feel happy because of that. Breathing out I am being looked after by the sangha and that makes me feel happy immediately. Breathing in I am beginning a new day with practice and that gives me a feeling of joy and happiness straight away.

[sound of the bell]

And joy gives rise to happiness, leads to happiness. Breathing in, in touch with the conditions of joy, I feel joy. Breathing out I embrace that joy and so in really touching that joy it becomes happiness. First of all we see the water and we are thirsty and we feel joy. Then we can pour the water to drink and drink it. That is happiness. The joy has to lead on to happiness. And this joy and happiness function is to nourish us, not to bring about suffering for us. These are the wholesome joy and happiness, not the joy and happiness of sensual desire, like the joy of sex or the joy of possessions, the joy of food. We hear the sound of the bell, we return to our breathing. We breathe in and with our capacity to be in touch with one of the conditions or many of the conditions of happiness our in-breath gives rise to the feeling of joy. We can nourish that joy as we breathe out or we make the feeling of peace and joy arise as soon as we breathe out. Breathing in we have joy, breathing out we have happiness. Or breathing in we have joy, breathing out we have joy. Breathing in we are happy, breathing out we are happy. So the sound of the bell should bring us both joy and happiness. This is the practice of joy and happiness. It is not autosuggestion. If we just imagine we are happy when we are not happy or imagine we are joyful when we are not joyful that is not the correct practice. When we read these details in the sutra we see that what the Buddha told is nothing... there is nothing weary of life in that. The Buddha taught that joy is real, peace is real, happiness is real and our practice is to nourish us with these things. We practice and we ask our brothers and sisters how they practice. So we can learn from other people's experience and every day our practice will increase, will get better.

We know that joy is a feeling, happiness is a feeling and the feelings here, the mental formations here are also feelings of which we are aware. Breathing in I am aware of the feeling which is present. Breathing in I am aware of the feeling that's now in me, whatever the feeling is, whether it's pleasant, painful or neither pleasant nor painful. It is to recognize the feeling. To recognize the mental formation is to recognize the feeling, the feeling which is in me at the moment. We know that feelings are a river. In our person there are five rivers. The river of the body, the river of the feelings, of the perceptions, of the mental formations and of the consciousness. Our body is a river. It is a formation, which is constantly changing, and each cell in the body is a drop of water and that drop of water is born and dies. Each cell in our body is constantly being born and dying, all cells in our body are constantly being born and dying. So we should learn how to look at our body, as a river which is constantly changing, being born and dying. And we should also learn how to look at our feelings as a river. These feelings arise, they endure and then they disappear. And each feeling is a drop of water in a river of feelings. And the seventh breathing is teaching us to look at the feeling, to recognize the feeling which happens to be present, whatever it is.

And the eighth breathing is to calm that feeling. That feeling, even if it is a feeling of joy, we need to keep it calm. Because in joy there is excitement and we have to calm that excitement. In happiness we can also calm our happiness. And if it is a painful feeling which comes from our worry, our anger, our jealousy, our despair we really need to recognize it and embrace it and this eighth breathing is to make it calm, calm down like a child which has a tummyache. We recognize that this child has a tummyache and we hold the child and we calm the child down. To recognize the feelings and to calm the feelings is the seventh and the eighth breathing. A practitioner has to know how to do this. You shouldn't just wait for these things to kill you. You should not allow your feelings to destroy your body and your mind. A practitioner, whenever they have a feeling, especially a feeling of suffering they should know how to use the energy of mindfulness in order to embrace that feeling, like a mother embraces her baby. And say that, you should say that "I'm here, I'm here. Your mother is here, mother is here. So don't worry. We will look after you. We will embrace your suffering." Don't run away from it. And when you are able to embrace it, you use the method of breathing in and breathing out in order to calm it down. That is called 'Calming the mental formation', calming the feelings in other words. And we remind you one more time: these four breathings are to deal with our feelings, the object is only feelings... of these four breathings.

Now we are going on to the next four breathings, the ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth. These breathings belong to the field of mind. Here we should use the word Than, meaning kayo or body. And here we should use the word mind. Mind means, quite clearly, Mental formations. Feelings are a mental formation. We learn in the Buddhist psychology school that there are fifty-one mental formations and feelings are one of them. Perceptions are another. And we have left after that forty-nine mental formations. Therefore mind here is referring to forty-nine mental formations. You can put fifty-one if you like. It doesn't matter. Because this method can also be used for feelings and perceptions. ... And we will see that the last four breathings, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen and sixteen... their object is phenomena. Dharma, here, means phenomena. So phenomena are one ... perceptions belong to this field. And this field is to deal with our perceptions. Perceptions bring us a lot of suffering. If we can actually transform our perceptions, then we can transform all our suffering. In the mind section we have forty-nine mental formations, in the feeling

section we have one mental formation and in the phenomena section we have one mental formation, mainly perceptions and that makes out fifty-one all together.

In the Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness we have four terms, four fields of mindfulness. Mindfulness of body, feelings, mind and objects of mind. (Thay in English:) 'Contemplation of the body in the body, contemplation of the feelings in the feelings, contemplation of the mind in the mind, contemplation of the objects of the mind in the objects of the mind.' Here, dharma means the objects of mind. All the forty-nine mental formations have that object and technically it is called 'dharma'. Dharmas are the object of perceptions. Dharmas are the object of mind. These four: body, feelings, perceptions and mind include all the five skandhas. So where does consciousness lie? As far as the sixteen breathings are concerned, consciousness, as far as I can see, is the earth which contains and stores all the seeds. And when the seeds manifest they become mental formations, fifty-one mental formations. Forty-nine belong to the mental formations section, one to the feelings and one to the perceptions. So the manifestation of consciousness can be found in three of the skandhas.

Consciousness is like a river. When we see all the drops of water, we can see the river. The manifestation is drops of water. When we can see the fifty-one mental formations, we can already see consciousness. We only meditate on what is manifested, how could we meditate on what is not manifest. So consciousness lies in mental formations, lies in perceptions, lies in the body and lies in feelings. Consciousness is the basis. Consciousness is the capacity to manifest and the other four skandhas are the actual manifestation. So consciousness is the basis of the other four skandhas and if we can see clearly the other four skandhas, then we can see consciousness. These fifty-one mental formations, as far as consciousness is concerned, are seeds. And when they manifest they are mental formations. So there isn't such a thing as consciousness outside of mental formations. Mental formations are consciousness and consciousness is mental formations. The four fields of mindfulness contain the five skandhas. Because all the drops of water in a river are the river. All the mental formations are the consciousness. If we know that we won't expect consciousness to be something different from mental formations. This is a new way of analysis, to help us to be able to see and to be able to bring the five skandhas into the practice of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness and see that they are the same thing, how the four... And if you haven't understood yet, you will understand, so don't worry.

The ninth breathing is gladdening the mind ... which in fact means the mental formations, being aware of the mental formations is the ninth breathing and the tenth one is gladdening the mental formations. The eleventh one is concentrating the mental formations and the twelfth one is liberating the mental formations, liberating the mind. We ought to know that these are expressions, ancient terms, and we need to replace new terms in order to make the meaning clearer. We understand and breathing in ... I am aware of the mental formation which is in me now. And this ninth breathing is different from the seventh breathing. So number seven is just for feelings and nine is for any other mental formation. Breathing in I am aware, I recognize the mental formation which is present in me now. Any mental formation, as long as it isn't feeling or perception. But we can also put feeling and perception in here if we want to. It doesn't really matter. The third river is the river of mental formations. Every wave we could say on the river is a mental formation anger, sadness, jealousy, and hatred. (Thay in English:) 'Breathing in I am aware of the mental formation that is in me.' That is we have to recognize and embrace it. And the tenth breathing is gladdening the mind. How can you make a mental formation in you more joyful? How can you make positive, wholesome mental formations arise?

This circular diagram symbolizes that inner store consciousness. If we draw a circle and we make it in two and what is underneath is store consciousness and what is on top is the mind consciousness. We know that the store stores all the seeds. When these seeds manifest they become a mental formation. Mental formation is the manifestation of the seed. When a seed manifests as a mental formation we need to be aware of it. And that is the fourth breathing. How do we practice the tenth? How can we make good mental formations appear in our mind consciousness? We have good seeds in us. How can we catch them and help them manifest? That is what is meant by gladdening the mind. You have the seed of joy, of happiness, of love, of forgiveness... and these good seeds have been handed down to us by our parents, by our teachers, by our patriarchs. And every day we help them to grow bigger and in this tenth breathing we try and touch them and allow them to manifest. Make them manifest as a mental formation. Because if we just let the seeds of sadness manifest and they will drown... they will take the whole space in our mind consciousness... and we won't have room in our mind consciousness for gladness.

Whenever we put on a nun's robe or monk's robe, we remember that we are a monk or a nun and we see that this life is beautiful and a happy life. And we can bring happiness to others as well and then our bodhicitta is naturally watered and touched. And we gladden our mind. We put our hand on our head and we feel our shaved head, we know that we are a monk or a nun. We see a younger brother or sister, when we are reciting the sutra, we feel glad. So there are many, many opportunities to be in touch with the good seeds in us. The seed of bodhicitta, the seed of love. And when just two or three good seeds manifest in our mind consciousness, we will have gladness. This is a practice we do every day. And we have to help these flowers to bloom, many times every day. That is gladdening the mind. And when those flowers have opened in our mind, our eyes open like flowers, our hands open like flowers and our steps are like flowers.

Yesterday in the Dharma discussion I said... in the hermitage there is a camellia tree and it's very beautiful. Now has it opened twelve flowers, very beautiful, very wonderful flowers. I have planted that camellia tree years ago. First it just had two flowers and they died very quickly because the plant wasn't used to being here. It hadn't put down many roots. The next year there were many buds but only a few flowers and they died quickly. But last year there were twelve flowers and they lasted a long time. When I look at that camellia tree, it's like a monk or a nun. In the first year they may not have put down their roots, so they don't get many flowers. In the second year it's better and in the third year they put down strong roots and are used to the customs of being a nun and give many, many beautiful flowers. All monks and nuns are like that. They all have fruits and flowers. If you practice properly, the flowers will open all the time not only in the spring. We can look at a monk or a nun and we can see them opening flowers every day. These flowers will bring happiness to many people. If you have confidence, if you have diligence, if you have mindfulness, if you have concentration, if you have wisdom, if you have happiness, if you have liberation when you think about the Buddha and Buddhism, you see you have a place of refuge. Whenever you look at the sangha, you feel joy and therefore you gladden your mind. Gladness manifests many times a day. So when walking, standing, talking, laughing is opening flowers for themselves and blooming flowers for others too. Some people open many flowers and some people's plants bloom with only a few. We should not feel inferior because we only have a few flowers. We know when we only have a few flowers, that all we need to do is to make our roots more strongly rooted in the soil and then quite naturally there will be more flowers and we will be able to help others and our own country. The duty of a monk or a nun is to bloom with flowers for the world.

That is the practice of gladdening the mind. When we see that that is what we are doing. As far as the camellia is concerned if it has not yet produced flowers we should be patient. We have to look after that camellia better, more. We should not blame, we should not be angry. Because a camellia will bloom. That is just because it hasn't managed to put down its roots yet that it hasn't. It's not the right time yet for it ... that it hasn't given flowers. All of us must practice to help that. The earth must help that camellia to have the strength to bloom. Everyone has to help the plant to bloom.

[sound of the bell]

And when we come as far as this, we see the meaning of the four right efforts, the four skillful means of diligence. Diligence is one of the paramitas, one of the six paramitas. The first right effort is: the unwholesome seeds which have not yet manifested, do not let them manifest. When the unwholesome seeds have manifested, how do we help them to return to seed-form as soon as possible? For example, we hear some music that waters negative emotions in us, or we look at a film, which has violence, hatred and craving in it, we are helping the unwholesome seeds in us to arise. If we don't look at that kind of film, we do not listen to that kind of music, we help the seeds not to manifest. That is the first right effort: do not allow to manifest unwholesome seeds which have not yet manifested. The second thing is: the unwholesome seeds which have manifested, help them to go back to their seed-form. Do not allow them to remain a long time in your mind consciousness. How do we do that? We have the precepts, we have the Fine Manners, we have the Dharma doors of sitting and walking and reading the sutra. Those are the ways to help the

unwholesome seeds to go back to their seed-form. Because the longer they stay in mind consciousness, the stronger they will become in store consciousness ... their root will become.

So we don't use the method of oppression, but we use the method of changing the peg. We take hold of our breathing, we invite a good seed to come into the mind consciousness. And when the good seed is already in our consciousness, the unwholesome seed will go back down. We can read some words in the sutra or we can read something our teacher or the Buddha has left for us. That will help us transform these things that have already manifested. The third thing is: the good seeds which have not yet manifested, how can we help them to manifest. That is the object of the tenth breath. Every day we have to allow these good seeds to sprout, as if it is the spring. And sometimes we will see a new flower... one flower... And then in the evening we see another flower. In the spring it's like that, the flowers are always coming up. That is why we call it spring. It means that the flowers are springing up from the earth. And we have to practice in such a way that we can allow the Dharma rain to fall on the seeds and the wholesome seeds will constantly be manifesting. So the third right effort is: the wholesome seeds which have not yet manifested, to help them manifest. The fourth right effort is: once the wholesome seeds have manifested, keep them as long as you can in the conscious mind. Don't allow them straight away to go back into seed-form. Because the longer you keep the wholesome seeds in the conscious mind, the stronger their roots will become. For instance, if you are planting tulips or onions, the longer the leaves and the flowers exist above the earth, the stronger the bulb becomes under the earth. Once the bulb is strong, then the flowers will easily appear. So the four right efforts, we can understand in terms of the tenth breathing. The eleventh breathing is to concentrate the mind. Concentrating the mind means: the mental formation which is present, we need take mindfulness in order to embrace it and keep it alive for a time. When there is mindfulness, there will be concentration. When we continue to embrace a mental formation with mindfulness, then we already, naturally, have concentration. Whether it happens to be a negative or a positive mental formation, and if we can embrace it for a time, we will quite naturally be able to look deeply into its basis, its nature. And when we look into its nature we have wisdom or insight. Concentration here is the beginning of insight. (Thay in English:) 'Breathing in I concentrate on the mental formation that is in me.' Breathing in I embrace the mental formation in me with the energy of mindfulness and concentration. I do not run away from it. I take it as an object, just as a researcher is aware of the object of his research or like a student doing mathematics exercise allows his concentration to embrace the mathematics. If we watch the television and try to do the mathematics at the same time, we will not be successful. We haven't got enough mindfulness and concentration to do the work. We have to put ourselves into a situation of concentration in order to be able to look in our mental formation of anxiety, sadness, jealousy, loneliness... And these things make us suffer. So we need to embrace them. Because we have the opposite tendency. We see that this is not comfortable and so we want to run away from it. But here we embrace it. We are determined. We are going to work with it. We have to use mindfulness and concentration to embrace it. If we don't embrace it, look into it, there is not way we can be liberated from it. In Vietnam there is a teacher, he is quite intelligent, but his life is not happy. He has an obstruction. He is intelligent, he has studied a great deal, he has many people who respect and love him, but he has been taught in an idea and he can not let go of it. He thinks that he is the best teacher. And he cannot bear the thought that there is a teacher who is better than him. And that idea has reasons for it. Because even when he was a baby novice, people praised him as being very intelligent. And when he was in the middle school, he was the top of the class and he was extraordinary. He passed his degree with extraordinary merit or something... Many people praised him as the best and that is what has destroyed him. Gradually the idea that he is the best, nobody is as good as him, has become an obstacle. He cannot accept the idea anybody could be better than him. So he is suffering. Now he has become an upadaya but he is still suffering. He has jealousy, irritation, because the idea that he is better than others is the root of his suffering. And he cannot see that. From the outside we see it so easily that he only has to give up the idea that he is the best. He is like everybody else. He doesn't have to be number one. But as far as he is concerned, it's very difficult. Because he doesn't have the courage to look and see that this is the root of his suffering... thinking that he is number one. And we can see quite clearly that all he has to do is let go of that idea that he is the best. He doesn't have to be number one, he can just be like everyone else and he would be happy. But his whole life he has not been able to do that, to let go of that idea. And in us... there are monks and nuns among us who are not quoting that idea, who can see that I am a nun among other nuns, I am a monk among other monks, I don't have to be any special and therefore we are very happy, easily happy. Concentrating the mind means practicing to embrace the mental formation, so we can look deeply at it. And when we can look into it and recognize it and see it is the root of our suffering, then we can let go of it and we will be liberated. That is what is meant by liberating the mind. Breathing in I am liberating, releasing my mental formation, I'm breathing out and I'm releasing my mental formation. Because my mental formation is a rope binding me... maybe the rope of craving, maybe the rope of hatred, maybe the rope of suspicion, maybe the rope of pride. These are ropes which bind us, bind our body and our mind, make our life unhappy. When we can look deeply at them and embrace them and undo them, then we have the happiness called liberating the mind. Liberating the mind means, I am able to undo, as I breathe in, the mental formations... I can liberate them by undoing the rope which they are. Mental formation, here, is an affliction. For instance ... our younger sister is always talking to Thay about us, to Thay, telling tales... younger brother is always telling tales about me, I never tell tales about him. This makes us suffer. We make ourselves suffer by having that thought. So we have to sit down and we have to undo that rope which is binding us. And then our mind will be liberated. We have to call our mental formations by their name. We have to call it craving, we have to call it pride, suspicion, wrong view... These are all the unwholesome mental formations such as listed in the list. So we do not allow these unwholesome mental formations to be ropes binding us. We have to look deeply at them, by recognizing them and then we will be concentrated on them and then we feel that we are liberated from them. We know that these four breathings concerned with the mental formations of the mind are very important. We shouldn't say 'oh yes I can do that'. There is much more to learn about them. There are forty-nine mental formations and it is a large practice for us to do. Whenever one of them arises, we should be able to qualify its name and we have to bear what discovers ... the causes for its arising. This monk I talked about in Vietnam, who thinks he's the best, is not fortunate because he was too successful too young and people were taken in by his capacity and they worshiped him like a god. And that is what destroyed him, made him think that he is number one... and therefore he's suffering. He cannot accept that anybody can be better than him. And he is a Buddhist. How can you think that a Buddhist could be like that, because Buddhists are not meant to have an idea of self. Even though he is an upadaya. Even if he makes miracles... he can perform miracles, he won't be successful in his practice. Because you should be able to be happy whether you're number ten... you don't have to be number one (because we're ten...). These twelve breathings have to be developed. We have to practice and we have to present our experience of the practice to others and help people who come after us know how to practice. These sixteen breathings are to help us... need to be developed. Breathing in I am aware of the mental formation which is present in me. I recognize it, simply recognize it, saying here is, you are called craving and I know you. (Thay in English:) '... craving, I know it. Hello, good morning.' The second breathing, if it is suspicion, you say... (Thay in English:) 'Hello there, I know you are the mental formation called suspicion. ... I know you. You are an old friend of mine... and laugh...' I have known you for a long time... that is recognizing the mental formation. And you should know how to recognize. Whenever you have a mental formation you should say hello to it. Don't allow it to come and go without being recognized, it's very important. Number ten is gladdening our mind. That is allowing the seeds of happiness arise every day, nourish them by Dharma talks, by practice, by walking meditation, by breathing, by reading the sutra... These are wholesome seeds and they need to manifest every day. Number eleven is that I concentrate on my mental formation. I've recognized it, but I don't allow it to go. I sit with it, I embrace it and I concentrate on it. (Thay in English:) 'Breathing in I focus my awareness and attention on my mental formation, I embrace dearly, I embrace deeply the mental formation that is in me.' And if there is concentration, there will follow, naturally, liberation. (Thay in English:) 'Breathing in I am liberating myself from this mental formation. Breathing out I am transforming this mental formation in order to liberate myself.' This is not something vague, up in the sky, under the earth. It's not a matter of prayer, this is a matter of practice, daily practice.' Now let's go on to the four breathings concerned with the dharmas, perceptions. We are able to destroy the wrong perceptions with the last four breathings. These four last breathings are connected with the third skandha, the skandha of perceptions. This is the first time I have talked about the four last breathings in forms of perception, the skandha of perception. The thirteenth breathing is awareness of impermanence. We have a number of ignorances. We have a number of blocks of ignorance. We think that things are always there. We think our body is permanent, our mind is permanent. We act as if we are going to be here for millions of years, we're eternal. We have heard the Buddha teach, we have heard our teacher tell us about impermanence, we have read the sutra about impermanence, we have intelligence and we know that the very most we can live is a hundred years. But we only know that superficially, only accept that superficially. But deep down there is something which always thinks that we will live forever, we are indestructible. That person, we think, has had a car accident, that person is in a hospital, that person has cancer, that person has died. But we don't think that it's us. We have that kind of foolishness. Therefore our insight into impermanence is

very superficial. We just see it as an idea, as a theory. And then we act in our daily life as if we were going always to be there... and our friends and our brothers and sisters are always there, Plum Village is always there, Thay is always there. But that isn't true. It's not like that. Our life is like a flash of lightning, like clouds in the sky... So we have to concentrate, we have to look deeply into impermanence, to see with every step and every breath, every mouthful of food... in terms of impermanence. And the impermanence, here, is not negative, is not pessimistic ... it's the truth and we have to understand it deeply. It also means no self. Because impermanence is essential for life. If things are not impermanent, there will be no life. For example, we want to plant sunflowers. If the sunflowers are to grow, there has to be impermanence. Because if we sow the seed of a sunflower and the sunflower seed is to stay the seed the whole time, there will be no sunflower. But the sunflower seed has to disappear in order to become the flower... that is impermanence. And the sunflower has to grow old and die in order for there to be seeds for the new sunflowers. It's very necessary for life. Don't say 'I don't like impermanence'. Because if you don't like impermanence, you don't like life. So therefore, don't think that impermanence is negative, is pessimistic, it is the basis of life. And impermanence means no self, because as far as time is concerned, we talk about impermanence and as far as space is concerned, we talk about no self. 'No self' is just another word for impermanence at least in the spatial element. It's the same thing. As far as time is concerned it's called impermanence, as far as space is concerned it's called 'no self'. Because there is nothing that can continue to be the same for two seconds. We breathe in and we breathe out, and we are different than we were before. When we breathe in, we are bringing so many different elements into ourselves. And the seeds are for carbon dioxide and oxygen, that you breathe out, other people will breathe in. That is the body breath. As far as other things are concerned it's the same. We inter-are. We are always affecting each other, we are always transmitting things to each other with every moment. And there is nothing that continues to be the same as it was two seconds ago. So impermanence means 'no self'. Nothing is definite, everything is changing. Impermanence and 'no self' are two aspects of life. And if you can see impermanence and 'no self', you can see interbeing and you can see emptiness and then, afterwards, you will have insight, you will have awakening and you will have peace. Because you have been able to look deeply into impermanence. And because you don't really know what impermanence is, you complain about it like the gatha which says "angry with someone in the ultimate dimension". We don't want to look at the other person we are angry with, we want to punish the other person. But according to this gatha we have to close our eyes and breathe and ask ourselves: 'Three hundred years from now, where will I be and where will you be.' And we see how foolish we are to be angry and want to blame that person, we want to open our arms and embrace that person, because the other person's presence is so precious in the present moment. Thanks to seeing impermanence, angry with each other in the ultimate, then mentions 'I close my eyes and look deeply, three hundred years from now, where will I be and where will you be?' That is the fruit of looking into impermanence: see we know that tomorrow we don't know whether we will still be here and therefore we want to do something today to make the other person happy. We cannot wait until tomorrow. Have you heard the story about going on a picnic? There was one monk and his disciple, they lived together and the disciple said: 'Teacher, why don't we go for a picnic on the hill?'

The disciple really wanted to go on a picnic with his teacher, but his teacher was terribly busy, I don't know why he was so busy but he was. And therefore the disciple said, "how can we have enough time to go on a picnic together?" The teacher said, "Yes I'm sure there will be, but after two months." But after six months they still hadn't been on a picnic, and several years later they still had not been on a picnic, and the disciple gave up. He said, "My teacher is always busy, he's either on the telephone, or driving the car, or sending us fax, he is always doing something". One day the two had to go out to the town together and there was a traffic jam, the teacher said, "disciple why don't you go faster?" and the disciple said, "Oh!, because there's a traffic jam, they're all going on a picnic." Because their whole life they have been so busy and now they have the opportunity to go on a picnic so they are doing that. So the reason why the teacher was unable to go on a picnic was because he wasn't able to see the impermanence of life.

The novices in the New Hamlet go on a picnic every Monday, I think it is very intelligent, because they're not waiting. So if it is possible, we should go on a picnic every day, every hour, to be happy. Whatever we can do to make ourselves happy and to make the people we love happy we should do today, and that is the insight into impermanence, and that gives us the capacity to live and to practice diligently to be liberated. Impermanence gives us the capacity to be able to let go, and once we let go we feel light, we feel liberated. The insight into impermanence gives us hope because nothing is always going to be like that, everything can be changed. Therefore the insight into impermanence is very important, the insight into impermanence leads to the insight into no-self, which leads to the insight into interbeing. And that can take us into the Avatamsaka realm, and we can live in the light, the world of no birth and no death.

The fourteenth breathing: Breathing in I am looking deeply into the 'not-worthy of being desired' nature of all dharmas, this is called 'viraga', not having attachment and desire for something. We should know that things are the objects of our perceptions, this board is the object of our perception, this plant is the object of our perception, and all these objects, these dharmas, are impermanent. That bait is something we are running after, but it is not worthy of our desire. We are ignorant and therefore we think that that bait is the object of our desire. We have to look deeply, carefully, into the nature of that object in order to see that it is not worthy of our running after it. This means 'the nature of not being worthy of our desire', we have to understand this breathing. When we throw down some bait into the river we know that in that bait is a hook, and we hope we will deceive the fish. The fish is just like a child, it just wants to eat, so we don't have to take a real bait, we can just make a bait out of plastic, and when we hook this plastic bait onto the hook the naive fish thinks that it's a real worm. If it knew how to look into the non-desirable nature of things, it would see the hook lying in the bait, and it would see the nature of 'not being worthy of being desired', not being worthy of being run after.

That is how we have to translate this breathing, it is not talking about our mind, it's talking about the things outside our mind, they're not worth desiring. The Buddha said there are five kinds of sensual desire, the desire for possessions and money, sex, fame, and good food. I don't know how many of us have suffered because of our desire for tasty food, we eat something because it tastes good, but we suffer a lot from it afterwards. We suffer because we swallow these four kinds of bait, and when we are suffering so much we begin to see that these things and were not worthy of our desire. The Buddha teaches us in the Sutras, he gave many examples about sensual desire, for example sensual desire is like a torch that we hold against the wind, the flame blows back and burns us. It is like a bone without flesh, which the dogs gnaws day and night, but gets no nourishment from it. The Buddha gave many examples like that for us to be able to see that the bait is not worthy of our desire, we suffer because we run after it. After we have looked deeply into impermanence we can look deeply into the non-desirable nature of the things we desire, because they bring hardship and suffering with them. So we have to be determined not to run after them. The Buddha said there was someone very thirsty and they went into a room and saw some pink water which smelled very fragrant, and somebody said, "Don't drink that, you will die if you drink it." The other person said, "If you just take a little lime juice then it will help you, but don't drink the pink water. But the person drinks the pink water and then they die, and this is the hardship, the misfortune, of desire. We have to see that these five sensual objects are not worthy of being run after. We have to keep reminding ourselves using the words of the Sutras and the reminders of the Sangha. If we live on our own without Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha we will easily lose ourselves on the path of running after the five sensual desires.

We should ask people who have suffered from running after the five sensual desires, to tell us about their suffering. It is a very good way to do it, because people suffer a great deal because of their attachment to the five sensual desires. We should ask them to come and talk to us about these things. If you haven't yet stepped into that realm of suffering you think that this is a good place to go, so you should ask someone who has been there to tell you about it. Often there are meditation students who come to Plum Village who have suffered greatly because of sense desires. We only have to listen to their suffering and their running after the happiness of sense desires, and we will be able to look deeply and feel very happy that we have not yet stepped into that realm.

The fifteenth breathing: I am breathing and looking into the no birth, no death nature of all dharmas, nirodha also means nirvana, means no birth and no death. So now we have gone deep into the subject of our meditation, once we have understood impermanence and the non-desirable nature of things then we come to nirodha, that is the silencing, the extinction, of birth and death. In the beginning we see that things are born and they die, they have a beginning and they have an end, they have a being and a non-being. But because we can look deeply into impermanence and no-self we can discover the ultimate dimension

where there is no birth and no death. At first we see the leaf is born and dies, it is and it is not, and if we look deeply into impermanence and no-self we can be in touch with the no birth and no death nature of the leaf. We see the leaf is like a Buddha, indeed it is not born and it does not die, it does not exist and it does not fail to exist, and we are the same, we also participate in the no birth, no death realm. The greatest duty of a monk, a nun, or a practitioner, is to go beyond the world of birth and death and participate in the world of no birth and no death. Because birth and death are just ideas of birth and death, the Heart Sutra teaches us that there is no birth and no death, nothing defiled and nothing immaculate. This is one of the Sutras that can help us go beyond the ideas of 'is' and 'is not', so that we can be in touch with the ultimate dimension where there is not the many and the one, and that is that world of nirvana, that is the aim of our practice to see no birth and no death. We have opened the door of no birth and no death, no coming and no going, we have opened the door of the ultimate dimension, and we are unshakable and free. Therefore the fifteenth breathing is to help us step into world of the ultimate dimension, and then we can go beyond birth and death. Therefore the Sutra on mindfulness of breathing takes us very far. There are people who despise me saying I just teach breathing in and breathing out. But in fact breathing in and out according to the Anapanna Sutra takes us a very long way. When they see in every retreat I just teach people how to breathe in and breathe out, they look down on me and they say, "Well he doesn't teach anything deep and wonderful, he just teaches breathing in and breathing out."

The sixteenth breathing. : Breathing in and contemplating letting go, releasing. Master Tang Hoi talks about the action of the hearer. If you cannot let go you cannot be liberated, you let go of your ideas about birth, about death, about exists and does not exist. Whatever ideas are making you suffer, you have to let go of them and then you won't suffer. Like the teacher who thinks he is number one, he just has to let go of that and he will be happy straight away. We have a suspicion, but if we can let go of our suspicion we will be happy straight away. We have the idea that this body is me, and if we can let go of that we will stop fearing straight away. We have an idea that 70 years is our life span, and if we can let go of that we will become deathless. We think that we have a separate self, our happiness is not the happiness of the other, and the happiness of the other is not our happiness. That idea of self stops us from being happy, we have to let go of ideas of self, of human being, of living being, and of life span. If we can let go of those ideas we can let go of everything, because if we are caught in any idea we will not be happy, and once we let go of that idea we will be happy. Whether that idea is the idea of success or the idea of happiness, look again into your own mind, have you ideas about success - you want to be like this, like that, you think that you will be happy when you get that decree or when you marry that person. You have to be number one to be happy, you will die because of ideas like that, . So take that idea of happiness away, embrace it and look deeply into it, and you know that when you can let go of that idea you will be happy.

Master Tang Hoi said that there are two things we have to let go of in order to be liberated; that is the idea of this body, that this body is me, and the idea of a life span, this is the length of life I'll have. We have to let go of those two ideas. They both lay in the Vajracchedika Sutra, the first is this body is me, many of us are caught in this idea, this body is me. If you look at this leaf, it says 'this body is me', it does not know that it is already existing in the tree. The leaf is a very small part of it, and sooner or later the leaf will become part of the tree. It looks beautiful and we want to press it in a book, but the book will be destroyed and so will the leaf, and the leaf will go back to the tree. 'This body is me', that is called the body of view. The body view, that means we see that this body is me, once we can give up that idea we will be happy, we will not be afraid. This stage of life is me and I was born in 19 so and so, and I will die in 2000 so and so, and I just exist for that amount of time, that is the idea of a life span. We cannot see ourselves before that or after that, that is ignorance, we have to let go of that idea of life span. That is why Master Tang Hoi said that we have to let go of the idea of body and life span. So the sixteenth breathing is very powerful practice of letting go of ideas, as soon as you can let go of your ideas you can be happy and secure.

This leaf is the skeleton of a bodhi leaf, I don't know if when the leaf sees it's skeleton it's afraid, but I think that it is very beautiful, so that is why I pressed it in a book. We have a skeleton like the leaf does and our skeleton can be beautiful too, so we have to look deeply in order to see that our skeleton is like the leaf, why are we so afraid when we see a skeleton? So I said to the brothers and sisters, "Please go and buy a skeleton, which we can hang up in the meditation hall, and we can come and join our palms before it and say "Hello skeleton". We have to see our own skeleton at the same time, we should be able to look at the skeleton and feel as normal and happy as we do when we look at the skeleton of this leaf, why do we discriminate? We are like the leaf, the leaf has a skeleton and we have a skeleton, why can't we look at the skeleton of a human being the way we look at the skeleton of a leaf. So please have one hanging up in your room as well, so when you wake up in the morning you will see the skeleton and you will get used to it, and it will finish your ignorance about skeletons. If you are living in a room with a skeleton hanging up day and night, what will be left for you to be afraid of. You've got a skeleton in yourself already, so why are you afraid of a skeleton outside yourself, it's very strange? So the reality is that we have a block of ignorance, and we have to educate that block of ignorance. Our practice is to look at our skeleton, whether it is the present skeleton or the future skeleton, in the same way that we look at a leaf. A leaf falls very gracefully and our life is like that too, the time when we change our body into another form. We have to see our skeleton is as beautiful as the leaf skeleton and there's nothing to be terrified of or afraid of. Has anyone ordered a skeleton yet? Please order one so we can hang it up in the meditation hall, and anyone who wants to borrow the skeleton and hang up in his or her room will be able to.

"So if the method of mindfulness of breathing is practiced in this way, according to these instructions it will be rewarding and of great benefit." I have translated it from Chinese, so you can compare the Chinese version which is in the Samyukta Agama with the Pali version. The order of the 16 breathings in the Chinese version is rather different from that of the Pali version, because #14 is letting go rather than #16. I think it is more correct in the Chinese, because to have letting go before you have the awareness of birthlessness and deathlessness is better. So you should all have a copy of the Chinese as well as the Pali in order to compare them.

In May we will have a retreat of 21 days in North America. In those twenty-one days we will just study the Sutra on mindfulness of breathing, and in that retreat we will go deeper because we have 21 days, whereas here we only have two or three dharma talks, and next Sunday we will finish talking about this Sutra.

Anyone here who has been a teacher in a French school will probably know where we can order a skeleton.

# Going to the Shore of Non-suffering

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Good morning, my dear friends. Today is the thirteenth of August, 1997, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We still have one *paramita* to learn.

Paramita means perfection, the perfection of the crossing over to the other shore. We have seen that a paramita is not so difficult to practice; even children can do it. Paramita means from this shore of suffering we cross over to the other shore, the shore of well-being. From the shore of anger, we cross to the shore of non-anger. From the shore of jealousy, we cross over to the shore of non-jealousy. If you know how to do it, you can cross over to the other shore very quickly. It is a matter of training, it is a matter of practice, and you can do that with the help of another person or many other persons. It's nice to cross the stream of suffering together, hand in hand. So every time you want to cross, if you feel that alone it would be a little bit too difficult, you ask someone to hold your hand and you cross together the stream of suffering with him or with her.

If you feel you are caught in anger and that anger is a kind of fire burning you, you don't want that; you don't want to stay on this shore suffering from anger—you want to get relief, you want to cross to the other shore. You have to do something. Row your boat to go to the other side. Whether that is walking meditation, mindful breathing, or anything that you have learned here from Plum Village, it can be a boat helping you to cross over to the other shore. Next time when you feel that you don't like it on this shore, you have to make a determination to cross to the other shore. You may like to say to a person that you love that you don't want to stay here on this shore, you want to cross over to the other shore, and you may like to ask the other person to help you to cross. There are many things we can do together. Sitting and listening to the bell—we can do together, as two brothers, two sisters, as mother and child, or father and child. We can sit down and practice together.

I know a young mother who has a little boy of four years old, and every time the boy is agitated, not calm, not happy, she will take his hand and ask him to sit down and practice breathing in and out with her. She told her child to think of the abdomen, the belly, and breathing in seeing the belly expanding, rising, and breathing out seeing the belly falling. They practice breathing together like that

three or four or five times, and they always feel better. If the mother left her baby alone to breathe, it would be a little bit difficult for him because he is so young, he cannot do it alone. That is why the mother sits next to him, and holds his hand, and promises to practice breathing in and out together. I have seen that, I have seen the mother and the child practicing in front of me. Because one day I had tea with them—the little boy wanted to have tea with me—so I offered him some tea, and we had a nice time together. Suddenly there was something, he became unhappy and agitated, so his mother asked him to practice that in front of me, and both did very well. So mother has to learn to practice with her child. Father also has to learn to practice with his child. This is a very good habit, a very good tradition, a husband has to learn to do it his wife, a partner has to learn to do it with her partner.

Every time there is one of us who is not happy, we have to help him, to help her, to go to the other shore. We have to support him, support her. We shall not say, “That is your problem,” no. There is no such thing as your problem; it is a problem for everyone. If one person suffers, then everyone around has to suffer too. If a father tells his son or his daughter, “That is your problem,” that means the father has not got the insight. There is no such thing as your problem, because you are my son, you are my daughter, and if you have a problem, that is our problem, not yours only. Because if happiness is not an individual matter, suffering also is not an individual matter. You have to help and support each other to cross the river of suffering. So next time when you feel unhappy, you cry, you don't want to be unhappy, then you may like to ask your father, your mother, your brothers, and your sisters to help. “Please help. I don't want to stay on this shore. I want to cross over.” Then they come and they will help you. He, she will help you.

You should know the practice. We should know how to practice walking meditation, to practice sitting and breathing in and out with our attention focused on our belly. We can invite the bell, to listen together. Every time you feel unhappy or angry, always you can practice listening to the bell. I guarantee that after having practiced three sounds of the bell, you will feel much better.

That is why it would be very helpful for each family to have a bell, a small bell, at least. I don't know whether they have small bells available in the shops, but I think that a bell is very useful. That is why children who come to Plum Village, they are always taught how to invite a bell. If we use a bell, then the whole family has to practice together. It's not possible that one person practices the bell and all the others talk and don't practice. We have to make an agreement within the family that every time there is a sound of the bell, everyone will have to stop—not only stop talking but stop thinking—and begin to breathe in and breathe



out mindfully. Your breathing will become deeper, slower, and more harmonious after several seconds. You know you are crossing while you breathe in and out mindfully and listen to the bell. You are actually crossing the stream of suffering. Maybe in Chinatown you can find a bell somewhere, and I think that Plum Village has to arrange so that there are bells in the shop, so that everyone in the family can get one.

I propose that in each home, each family, there be a bell, and I propose that we arrange so that in each house there is one place to practice listening to the bell and breathing in and breathing out. In our house, there are rooms for everything. There is a room for guests, there is a room for playing, there is a room for eating, there is a room for sitting, for everything. Now, as a civilized family, we have to invent another room. I call it the breathing room. Or you might like to call it the practice room, or meditation room—a room that is for the restoration of peace, of joy, of stability. It is very important. You have a very beautiful room for television, and you don't have a room for your own peace, your own joy, your own stability. That's a pity. No matter how poor we are, we have to arrange so that we have a small place, a room in our family, to take refuge in every time we suffer. That room represents the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. When you step into that room, you are protected by mindfulness, by the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Children have to take care of that room. Because according to the practice, once they get into that room, no one can shout at them any more, including parents, because that is the territory of peace. You can take refuge in that, and no one can shout at you and chase after you any more. It is like the compound of an embassy. The compound of an embassy belongs to the territory of that country, and no one can invade that.

That is why in each home we should have such a room, very sacred. You should not use that room for other purposes. You should not go into that room to play chess, to play the radio, to do other things. That room is just for the practice of breathing, of listening to the bell, of sitting meditation, of listening to the dharma talks, dharma discussions. That room should be only for peace, for the restoration of peace and joy. When you know that there is someone in the room practicing, you should respect that, and not make a lot of noise. You know when you drive through a zone where there is a hospital, you know that many sick people are in the hospital and they need quiet—that is why you don't blow the horn, you don't make a lot of noise. The same thing is true when you know that there is someone in a meditation hall, in the breathing room; you should try not to make noise in the house. If mother is in the meditation room, then you should turn off your phonograph or your television. This is a very good practice.

Every time you get angry, you get upset, you suffer, you know that you need the breathing room. So you think of the breathing room, and as soon as you begin to think of the breathing room, you feel already a little bit better; you know what to do. You don't accept to stay there without doing anything, just to be a victim of your anger, of your suffering. That is why you slowly stand up, you breathe in, breathe out mindfully, and you begin to walk in the direction of the breathing room. "Breathing in, I make one step, breathing out, I make one step." When people see you doing like that, they will have a lot of respect: "This person, although she is very young, she knows how to take care of her anger and her suffering." Everyone will be looking at you with respect, and they will stop laughing and talking loudly; they might follow their breathing to support you. That is the practice. Mother and father—who have received the teaching, who know what it is like to be in anger, who know how to practice when they get angry—mother and father will stop talking and breathe in and breathe out and follow you with their eyes, until you open the door and enter inside. Holding the knob of the door, you breathe in; pulling the door, you breathe out; and you go into it and you close the door behind you peacefully. You bow to the flower in the room—because it would be wonderful to keep one flower alive in that meditation hall, any kind of flower. That flower represents something fresh, beautiful, the Buddha inside of us.

You don't need a lot of things in that breathing room. You need only a pot of flowers—if you have a nice drawing of the Buddha, you can put that—otherwise, one pot of flowers, that will be enough. And one bell, one small bell. I trust that when you go home you will try your best to set up that important room within your home. And you bow to the flower, you just sit down. Maybe you have a cushion—a child should have his or her own cushion—and you need a cushion that fits you, where you can sit beautifully and with stability for five or ten minutes. Then you practice holding the bell in the palm of your hand, you practice breathing in, breathing out, as you have been instructed, and then you invite the bell, and you practice breathing in and breathing out. You practice listening to the bell and breathing in and out several times until your anger and your suffering are calmed down. If you enjoy it, you may like to stay there longer.

You are doing something very important—you are making the living Dharma present in your home. Because the living Dharma is not a Dharma talk. A Dharma talk may not be a living Dharma, but what you are doing—walking peacefully, breathing mindfully, crossing the river of anger—that is a real Dharma and you, it is you who are practicing, who are crossing, so you inspire a lot of respect. Even your parents have to respect you because you embody the

Dharma, the living Dharma. And I will be very proud of you. If I see you, I will know that you are doing so.

I know of a family in Switzerland, a family of seven or eight brothers and sisters, a very big family, and they spent time in Plum Village, they learned about these things, and one day while they were home they got into a kind of dispute. Usually one month or two after coming back from Plum Village, you can still keep the atmosphere of peace alive. But beyond three months, you begin to lose your practice. You become less and less mindful, and you begin to quarrel with each other. So that day, everyone in the family was talking at the same time—all the brothers and sisters except one, the youngest. She suffered, she didn't know why all the brothers and sisters quarreled and suffered at the same time, so it was she who remembered that the bell is needed. So she stood up and reached for the bell, she breathed in and breathed out, and she invited the bell, and suddenly mindfulness came back. Everyone stopped shouting at once, everyone was breathing in and out, and after that everyone burst out laughing, and laughing, and laughing, and made peace with each other. That was thanks to the youngest member of the family. I think she was five at that time. Now she is fourteen, and she is here now today.

[Bell]

If you are an adult, you can practice like that, like your child. Every time you get angry at your husband, at your wife, at your brother, or at your child, you can do like that. Instead of arguing and shouting, you stand up, you breathe in and out, and you practice walking meditation to your breathing room. Your child will see it, your husband, your wife, will see it. They will have respect for you, they know that you are able to handle your anger, to take care of yourself, to love yourself. They will stop what they have been doing, and they may begin to practice.

When you are in the breathing room, inviting the bell, listening to the bell deeply, and practicing breathing, one of your children may like to join you. So while breathing, you may hear the sound of the door opening smoothly. You know that someone in the family is joining you; that may be your child that may be your husband or your wife. You feel much better that you are not practicing as an individual any longer, but you are practicing as a Sangha. That will warm up your heart, as you feel that someone is sitting close to you and beginning to breathe in and breathe out—this is wonderful. Maybe the person—the person who made you angry—after a few moments, feels that he will have to join you in practice. Then you hear the door opening again, and there, he's coming and sitting close to you, and you are flanked by the two people you love the most in the world, practicing breathing in and out. There is no one to take a picture of all

of you, but that is the most beautiful picture that could be taken of the family. Maybe you do not have any lipstick or powder on your face, you do not wear the best dress, but there you are in the most beautiful state of being, because all of you know how to practice. All of you embody the living Dharma at this moment. This is something we have to learn—this is a good habit, it's a good tradition, and you are truly the sons and the daughters of the Buddha.

I would like to transmit to the young people today something that they may use in the future. That is a cake. But this cake is not visible now. If it happens that your mother and your father get into a dispute—that happens from time to time—and you don't like these moments, the tension in the family, the disagreements between your father and your mother. The tension is coming up, one of them said something not very nice to the other, and you suffer. It is like the sky just before a storm. It is a heavy, oppressive atmosphere and a child always suffers in such a condition. I have been a child, and I did suffer when the atmosphere in the family was heavy and oppressive like that. But you know that you should not continue to be a victim because it's not healthy to stay long in such an atmosphere. You should do something. There are children who try to run away, but their apartment is too small and they are on the fifth floor. There is no garden around. So they could not get away.

Many children choose to go into the bathroom and lock the door to avoid the tension and heavy atmosphere in the family. Unfortunately, even in the bathroom the atmosphere was still felt. It's not healthy to be in such an atmosphere. Father and mother do not want to make their child suffer, but they cannot help it—they get into a tension, a conflict. In that moment, I would suggest that you do this: you pull the dress of your mother and you say, “Mommy, it seems that there is a cake in the refrigerator.” Just do that; this is another mantra that I am transmitting to you. Whether there is a cake or there is no cake in the refrigerator, you just open your mouth, after having breathed in and out three times, and you say, “Mommy, there is a cake in the refrigerator.” Just say that.

It may happen that there is a cake. Your mother will say, “That's true. Why don't you bring some chairs to the backyard? I will make some coffee and bring the cake down for you and for your daddy.” She will say that, and she will take the excuse to withdraw to the kitchen. Because she also wants to cross to the other shore; she doesn't want to stay there forever and get destroyed. But if there is no pretext, it would be impolite, provocative, to just leave like that. So you help her. You say, “Mommy, it seems that there is a cake in the refrigerator,” and she will know, she is intelligent, she knows what you mean. You mean that you don't want this to continue. Then when you hear your mother say this, you say “Yes!”

and you run, you run away. You run to the backyard, you arrange some chairs and you clean the table back there. Your Mommy will go into the kitchen, she will boil some water for tea, she will ask you to come and help bring the cake to the backyard and so on. Both of you are doing these things and practicing mindful breathing together. It is very nice, and I will be very proud of you both. You know that you can do it. Please.

Then your father, left alone in the living room, he has seen that, and he has been in Plum Village, so he knows that his wife and his child are practicing. He feels ashamed if he doesn't practice. So he stays there and practices breathing in and out also. He may join you in the backyard with the cake, and the three of you will be over to the other shore in just ten minutes. Don't worry if there is no cake in the refrigerator because your mommy is very talented. She can always fix something.

So this is a cake that I want to transmit to you today, a cake that never disappears. This kind of cake is forever. This is one way of practicing paramita—crossing over. There are many Dharma doors. Dharma doors mean methods of practice. The breathing room is one Dharma door, a wonderful Dharma door. In the next century that's coming in two years, I want to see in every home a breathing room, a sign of civilization. If you are a writer, if you are an artist, if you are a reporter, if you are a novelist, if you are a filmmaker, please help. If you are an educator, a Dharma teacher, please help. In every home, there will be a breathing room for us to take care of our nerves, of our peace, of our joy. We cannot be without a breathing room. So the breathing room is one Dharma door that we have to open to the new century, and the cake is also a Dharma door.

When you hear the bell, please stand up and bow to the Sangha before you go out.

[Bell]

The last pebble, we call it *virya* paramita: the continued growth, the continued transformation. We know that when we cook potatoes, we have to keep the pot covered and should not take the lid off because the heat might get out. Also, we have to keep the fire on underneath. If we turn the fire off, then the potatoes could not cook. After five minutes, if we turn the fire out, then we cannot expect the potatoes to cook, even if we turn on the fire for another five minutes, and we turn it off. That is why there should be continued progress, continued practice, the continuation, the steady practice—that is called *virya*.

In terms of consciousness, we know that there are seeds to be watered and there are seeds to be transformed, and if we can continue to water the positive seeds and to refrain from watering the negative seeds, instead we know how to transform them—that is the process of continued transformation. Let us visualize our consciousness. This circle represents our consciousness, and the lower part is called “store consciousness” (*alayavijñāna*) and the upper part is called “mind consciousness” (*manovijñāna*). [Thay draws a diagram.] We know that in our store consciousness there are all kinds of seeds, positive and negative, buried here, and there are something like 51 categories of seeds. If it is a negative seed, the practice consists in preventing it from manifesting itself in the upper part of consciousness. You recognize that there is a negative seed in you and you would not like it to be watered, because if it is watered then it will have a chance to manifest itself in the upper level of your consciousness and it will become a mental formation.

Suppose this is a seed of anger. As far as it accepts to stay still in the store consciousness, you can survive, you are fine, you can smile, you can be joyful, you can even be happy with the seed of anger in you, with the condition that it accepts to stay still. But if someone comes and waters it, touches it, or you yourself water it, then it will manifest itself on the level of mind consciousness. And there is a zone of energy called anger, and it makes the whole scenery unpleasant. It may stay here for some time, maybe for a few minutes, sometimes a half hour, sometimes the whole day, and the more it stays, the more you suffer. And the more it is here, manifested, the stronger it becomes at the base. So if you allow it to manifest, you get two disadvantages. The first is that you suffer up here, and the second is that it grows bigger here. That is why the practice of virya consists in not giving it a chance to manifest.

So if you love yourself, if you care for yourself, you have to arrange so that you will be protected, you will not touch it and water it, and you ask your friends not to water it. “My dear, if you really love me, don't water that negative seed in me. You know I have that weakness; I have that seed in me. If you water that seed in me, I will suffer and you will suffer too.” So if we love each other, we should know each other, we should know the negative seeds in each other, and we should practice so that we do not water them every day. This is the practice of virya. We should plead with the people around us. “Dear people, you know me, you know my weakness, you know these seeds in me. So, please, if you love me, if you do care for me, please refrain, please do your best to protect me and not to touch, to water these seeds in me.” We have to sign a peace treaty. We don't practice alone, we practice with a Sangha, with the people we love, also.

If it has already manifested, then we should know the ways to embrace it and to help it go back as soon as possible to the store consciousness. Because the sooner it goes back, the better you can feel; because here you don't have to suffer long, and down here it doesn't have a chance to grow too big. That is the first meaning of virya. The negative should not be encouraged to manifest. And if it has manifested, do whatever you can to take care of it and to have it go back down here as soon as possible.

Third, the good seeds. Please do whatever you can in order for them to manifest as wholesome mental formations. If you know how to love yourself, to take care of yourself, then please look and realize that you have good seeds in you, seeds that have been transmitted by your ancestors, your teachers, your friends. You do whatever you can to allow them a chance to manifest. Because mind consciousness is like a living room, and you would like to invite into your living room only the pleasant people. With a beautiful pleasant person in your living room, you know it is very pleasant, you enjoy it. So don't allow your living room to be visited by unpleasant people. Invite only beautiful people, pleasant people to be there. That is the third practice of virya. You do that by yourself. You have all the seeds of happiness in here. You have a poem, you have a song, you have a thought, you have a practice, and every time you touch that, you invite it to the upper level of your consciousness and then you feel wonderful, and you keep it in your mind consciousness as long as possible.

Your mind is like a television set, or rather, it is like a computer with many hard disks down here. This is the screen of your computer; you can invite whatever you have down here up there. Selective invitation that is your practice. You invite only the things that are pleasant. Sometimes the pleasant things are buried down here under many layers of unpleasant things, so you need to help, so that you can take these jewels up to the screen. Leave them up as long as you can, keep them as long as you can, in the upper level of your consciousness. A piece of music, a poem, a happy souvenir, the seed of love, the seed of compassion, the seed of joy—all these positive seeds in you should be recognized and should be touched, should be invited. You ask the people around you, the ones who share your life, "Please my darling, please my friends, if you really love me, really want to help me, please recognize the positive seeds in me and please help these seeds to be touched, to be watered every day." That is the practice of love. To love means to practice selective watering of the seeds within the other person and within yourself.

Whatever good, pleasant seed is manifested here, we try our best to keep it as long as we can. Why? Because if it stays long in here, at the base it will grow. This is the teaching in the *abhidharma*, the Buddhist psychology. Buddhist

psychology speaks of consciousness in terms of seeds. *Bija* is a seed and we have all kinds of seeds within our store consciousness. Store consciousness is sometimes called the totality of the seeds (*savabijaka*). Seeds transform into mental formations. Unwholesome seeds are born here in the mind consciousness as unwholesome mental formations. Wholesome seeds are manifested as wholesome mental formations.

So take care of your living room. Take good care of the screen of your computer and do not allow the negative things to come up. And allow, invite, the positive things to come up and keep them as long as you can. There will be a transformation at the base if you know how to do it. This is the virya paramita: continued practice, continued growth, continued transformation—it should be the same.

[Bell]

Now we should go back to other paramitas. [Thay writes on board.] First is *dana* (giving). Second is *prajña* (insight). This is *shila* (precepts or mindfulness training). This is *dhyana* (meditation), consisting of stopping and looking deeply. And this is *ksanti*, translated in Plum Village as inclusiveness. If you only participated in one of the four weeks in Plum Village, you may like to listen to other dharma talks in order to understand, to have a clearer and deeper understanding of the other five paramitas. We have been showing the nature of inter-being between the six paramitas. If you practice one of the paramitas deeply, you practice all six. You cannot understand one paramita unless you understand all the other five.

So continued practice here means that you continue to practice giving; you continue to practice the mindfulness trainings, you continue to practice inclusiveness (embracing whatever there is), continue to practice stopping, calming, and looking deeply. And you continue to practice understanding. All five are the contents of the sixth. And this is true of all of the paramitas. We have used Dana paramita as an example, because understanding is a gift, a great gift. To be able to stop, to calm, and to look deeply is a great gift. To continue your practice is a great gift. To practice embracing everything, including what you may think to be unpleasant in the beginning, that is also a gift. Living according to the five mindfulness trainings is also a great gift. So you cannot practice giving unless you practice the five other paramitas. And this can be applied with all the paramitas, the inter-being of the six paramitas.

In the beginning, I told the children that you don't need money at all to practice Dana. You offer your freshness, you offer your presence, you offer your stability,



your solidity, your freedom. That's a lot already. And these things can be cultivated by the practice of the other paramitas.

All the six paramitas have the power to carry us over to the other shore so that we will not suffer anymore. After some time, training yourself, you'll arrive at the state of being when you can cross the stream of suffering very easily and very quickly. You have to master the practice, and you are no longer afraid. It is like knowing how to make tofu. If you know that there is no longer any tofu in the house, you are not afraid. A few hours and then you have tofu again. You know how to garden, to practice organic gardening. You know that there are heaps of garbage in your garden. You are not afraid because you know how to transform the garbage back into compost, and you are not afraid at all. While transforming the garbage into the compost, you can be very joyful. Therefore, we are no longer afraid of the garbage in us, the afflictions, the suffering in us. We know how to handle them, how to transform them; therefore, crossing to the other shore is a joy. You don't have to suffer even while crossing. You don't think that only when you arrive at the other shore you stop suffering, no. Crossing is already a pleasure.

It's like a child, when she knows that there is a breathing room, she stands up, and she practices walking meditation to the breathing room, and she already feels better because she knows the way, she knows what to do. So if you train yourself in the six paramitas, they will become a habit, a tradition, a routine; and every time you want to cross, you just cross, and not making a lot of effort, you just cross. It's like how you walk, you practice walking meditation. And you will not suffer any setbacks. You train yourself until you arrive at the state of being called the state of no setbacks, always progressing, not backsliding. That is the meaning of virya. You have mastered the techniques, the ways. That is why you never go back to the state of utmost suffering in which you were caught before.

Life is a continuation of transformation; it's just like gardening. You cannot expect that your garden will only produce flowers—your garden does produce garbage. That is the meaning of life. Those who suffer don't know the art of transformation—that is why they suffer, because of the garbage in them—they don't know how to transform. But you, you know the art of transformation; that is why you can embrace even your suffering, and you are able to transform. You never get back to the state of being overwhelmed, not knowing what to do with your suffering. If you train yourself in the six paramitas, one day you will feel that you are no longer afraid of any suffering. It's like doing the dishes. Of course, every day you have to use dishes, you have to eat, and therefore you produce dirty dishes. But for us, making dishes clean is very easy. We have detergent, we have water, we have soap, we have the time, we know how to

breathe in, breathe out, how to sing while doing the dishes. So doing the dishes is no longer a problem. It can be very joyful. So you don't suffer a setback any more, just because you know the way, you know the paramitas, you have the boats to cross over to the shore.

In the bell there are a few questions that I have not answered. The newest questions that I have are these two. "Thay, why don't I feel that I love myself? I am unable to love myself." That is one question. And the other question is: "Without anger, without hate, how could I have the energy to work for social justice? How could you really love your enemy? If you love your enemy, what kind of energy is left for you to step up your struggle. If you accept your enemies as they are and then you do nothing?" So these two questions, I think they are linked to each other. And I think that the elements of the answers to these questions have already been offered in the Dharma talks. But we need to work with ourselves, we have to practice mindful breathing, mindful walking, looking deeply, and recognize all the seeds in order to see the true nature of inter-being, then we could understand the real answers to these questions—not only as theory, but also as practice.

"Why don't I love myself? Why is it so difficult for me to love myself?" The question can be answered by yourself, if you look into what you call "love," what you call "self." You have an idea of love, an idea of self that is very vague. If you look deeply into what you call love, if you look deeply into what you call self, then you will not feel that way anymore. Self is made of what? Of non-self elements. Looking into yourself deeply, you can see all the non-self elements within you.

When I look into my store consciousness, I see the seed of hate, the seed of fear, the seed of jealousy, but I also can see the seed of generosity, the seed of compassion, the seed of understanding. So these seeds must be opposing each other, fighting each other within me, like good and evil fighting, the angel and the beast. They are always fighting within me. How could I have peace at all? It seems that you have something in you that you are not ready to accept. There is a judge in you, that is a seed, and there is a criminal that is being judged in you, and both are not working together in you. So there is a deep division in you, a deep sense of duality within yourself, and that is why you feel that you are alienated from yourself. You cannot love yourself, you cannot accept yourself. But if you know how to look at things in the light of inter-being, you know that everything is linked to everything else and the garbage can always serve as the food for the growth of the flower.

The other day I said that while walking in the Upper Hamlet, enjoying so much the flowers, the vegetation, the beauty, I came to a place where I saw there was some excrement left by a dog or something like that. I told the children I did not mind because I have a great trust in the earth. Earth is great, earth has a big power of transformation, and I know that earth will be able to transform the dirty things into nutritive elements soon for the vegetation. So I still continued to smile, and I didn't mind at all. I saw the inter-being nature of the two things, the flower and the excrement. Looking in one, I saw the other.

The same thing is true with garbage and flower, afflictions and compassion and happiness. All mental formations in us are of an organic nature. If we know how to take care, to embrace, we will be able to transform and we will make the afflictions into the kind of nutriment that will grow, that will help my wisdom, my understanding, my love, my compassion, to grow. If you have that kind of insight into yourself, that both garbage and flowers inter-are, you would be able to accept the negative things in you in the way an organic gardener would be able to accept the garbage in her garden, because she knows that she needs the garbage in order to nourish her flowers. You are no longer caught in the dualistic view, you suffer much less.

Then when you look back, look deeply into your so-called self, you see that your self is made of non-self elements. What you don't like in you, you are not responsible for alone. Your society, your parents, your ancestors are equally responsible. They have transmitted those seeds to you because they have not had a chance to recognize them. They did not have a chance to learn how to transform them, that is why they have transmitted them to you. Now you have an opportunity to recognize them, to learn ways to transform them, and you take the vow to transform them for your sake and for the sake of your ancestors, your parents, your society. That is the vow of a great being, of a bodhisattva.

So if you understand things like that, you will not say, "Why don't I love myself?" It is possible to love yourself. The way offered in Plum Village is very concrete, how to love yourself. Your self, first of all, is made of your body. You love yourself by the way you eat, you drink, you rest, you relax. You don't love yourself because you don't practice these things, you don't allow your body to rest. You force your body to consume the things that destroy it. So how to love your body, it is written down very clearly in the teaching of Plum Village: mindfully eating, mindfully consuming, mindfully allowing your body to rest and to restore itself. When we come to Plum Village, we have to learn these things. Sometimes you don't love yourself, you destroy yourself, and yet you don't know. The Buddha said that there are people who think that they are the lovers of themselves, but in fact they are enemies of themselves. They are doing

harmful things to themselves, they are destroying themselves, and yet they think that they are loving themselves. They destroy themselves with their lack of mindfulness in eating, in drinking, in dealing with their body, with their feelings, with their consciousness.

When you have a feeling—pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral—do you know how to recognize it? Do you know how to embrace it? To calm it? That is the process of loving. When you come to Plum Village, you have to learn these methods of recognizing, accepting, calming, and transforming. To love means to practice—to practice looking, seeing, understanding, and transforming. When you love yourself like that, you love other people also. You love your ancestors, you love your parents, you love your children and their children, and you love us all by taking good care of yourself and loving yourself. Because you are made of us. Your self is made of non-self elements, including ancestors, clouds, sky, river, forest, and us.

You may say, “I want to love myself, but I don't feel that I can love myself.” If you understand the teaching, if you can look into yourself and the nature of love, you see that love is a process of practice. Unless you practice, according to the teaching, you are not loving yourself at all, and not loving yourself, you cannot love anyone. Because self-love is at the same time the love for others. The moment when you know how to breathe in mindfully and smile, you make yourself feel better and you make the person in front of you, behind you, feel better also.

As far as hate is concerned, it is the same. You say that there is a lot of social injustice and other people are doing evil things to destroy themselves, to destroy you, to destroy the world, and it feels good to be angry at them. But who are they, who are you? You feel that you have to do something to help the world, to help society, but who is the world, who is the society?

When you see delinquent children, caught in drugs, in violence, and locked up in prisons, do you think that you should hate them or you should love them? You should take care of them. Why do they behave like that? Why do they look for drugs? Why do they have recourse to violence? Why do they oppose their parents, their society? There must be reasons why they do so. One day they may kill you, they may use a gun and shoot you down, they may burn your car. Of course, you can get angry at them, you can fight them, and if you have a gun you might like to shoot them down before they shoot you. But that doesn't prevent them from being the victims of society, of their education, of their ancestors, because they have not been well taken care of. Punishing them would not help

them; there must be another way to help them. Killing them would not help them.

There was a sea pirate who raped a small girl of twelve years old on a refugee boat. Her father tried to intervene, and they threw her father into the ocean and he drowned. After the girl was raped, she was so ashamed, she suffered so much —also because of the death of her father—she jumped into the ocean and drowned.

That kind of tragedy took place almost every day when there were boat people. There was not a day when we did not receive news like that in the office of the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation in Paris during the war. I remember the morning when I read the report about that girl, I did not eat my breakfast, I went into the woods. I practiced walking meditation, embracing the trees, and so on. Because I felt I was being raped and I was one with that child. I was angry at first. But I knew that I had to take good care of myself, because if I let the anger overwhelm me, make me paralyzed, then I could not go on with the work I should do, the work of peace and taking care of the victims of the war. Because at that time, at the office of the Buddhist Peace Delegation in Paris, we took care of providing the delegations in the peace talks with real information, trying to stop the war, and trying to relieve the suffering of war victims, including orphans and so on. At that time we were able to get support for more than 8,000 war orphans to continue to live and to go to school. So we could not afford to be paralyzed by such news that came every day into the office, so we had to practice together. Without mindful breathing, mindful walking, and renewing ourselves, how could we go on with our work when we were flooded with information like that about the war?

That night in sitting meditation, I saw myself born in a fishing village along the coast of Thailand, because I was meditating on the sea pirate. I saw myself as born in the family of a poor fisherman, and my father was very poor. My mother also was very poor. Poverty had been there for many generations. My father got drunk every night because the work was so hard and he earned so little, and he beat me every time he got drunk. My mother did not know to read and to write, did not know how to raise a child, and I became a delinquent child, playing with other delinquent children in the village along the coast of Thailand. At the age of 12, I already followed my father to the sea to help him with the fishing. I had seen girls and boys who were dressed in beautiful dress, who went to school in their beautiful automobiles, and I felt that I would never enjoy that kind of life at all.

Now I am a fisherman on my own. I have my fishing boat, and yesterday someone told me that the refugees very often bring with them some gold, and if I just go and take that gold just one time, I will be able to get out of this kind of chronic poverty and that will give me a chance to live like other people. So without understanding, without compassion, just with that kind of aspiration, I agreed to go with him as a sea pirate. When out in the sea I saw the other pirates robbing and raping the girl, I felt these negative seeds in me also come up very strong—there is no policeman around, there is freedom, you can do everything you like here, nobody sees you—so I became a sea pirate, and I raped the twelve-year-old girl, and she jumped into the river. Nobody knows. I have some gold now.

If you are there on the boat and if you have a gun, you can shoot me, I will die. Yes, I will die and that is the end of my life. You shoot me, yes; you can prevent me from raping the girl, yes; but you cannot help me. No one has helped me since the time I was born until I became a 18-year-old fisherman. No one has tried to help me—no educator, no politician, no one has done anything to help me. My family has been locked in the situation of chronic poverty for many hundreds of years. I died, but you did not help me.

In my meditation, I saw the sea pirate. And I saw also that that night along the coast of Thailand, 200-300 babies were born to poor fishermen. I saw very clearly that if no one tried to help them, then in 18 years many of them would become sea pirates. If you were born into the situation of that sea pirate, if I were born into the situation of that pirate, then you and I could become sea pirates in 18 years. So when I was able to see that, compassion began to spring up in my heart, and suddenly I accepted the sea pirate.

You have to do something to help them, otherwise they will become sea pirates. Shooting them is okay, but it does not solve the problem. Locking up the people who use drugs and who do violence is okay, but that is not the best thing to do. There are better things to do. There are things you can do to prevent them from being what they are now, and that is the work of love. In the enemy, you can see the beloved one. That does not mean that I would allow them to continue the crime, the violence, to destroy. I would do whatever I could to prevent them from causing harm, but that does not prevent me from loving them. Compassion is another kind of energy.

You say that anger is a formidable source of energy that pushes you to act. But anger prevents you from being clear in mind, from being clear sighted. Anger cannot give you lucidity, and in anger you can do many wrong things. As parents, we should not teach our children when we are angry. Teaching our

children when we are angry is not the best time. It does not mean that we should not teach them, but we teach them only when we are no longer angry. We don't teach with the energy of anger, we teach only with the energy of love, of compassion. That is true with the sea pirates, with the people who are destroying life. We have to act, but we should not use the energy of anger as fuel. We have to use the energy of sacrifice, the energy of compassion.

Great beings like the Buddha or Jesus Christ, they know the power of compassion, of love. And there are people among us who are ready to suffer, to die, for love. Please don't underestimate the power of compassion, of love. With the energy of compassion in you, you continue to remain lucid and understanding is there. When understanding is there, you will not make a mistake. You are motivated by love, but love is born from understanding.

[Bell]

Many of us are motivated by the desire to do something for social change, for restoring social justice. But many of us get frustrated after a period of time because we don't know how to take care of ourselves. We think that the evil is only in the other side, but we know that the evil is within us. Craving, anger, delusion, jealousy—they are in us. If we don't know how to take care of them, to reduce their importance, to help the positive qualities in us grow, we would not be able to continue our work, and we'll be discouraged very soon, overwhelmed by despair. There are many groups of young people who are strongly motivated by the desire for social action, but because they don't know how to take good care of themselves, they don't know how to live and work with harmony among themselves, they give up the struggle after some time.

That is why it is very important that we take good care of ourselves, and then learn to look at the other people not only as criminals but also as victims. Of course, we should do everything we can to stop them in the course of their destruction. But we should also see that they are to be helped at the same time. We should be able to make it very clear to them that, "If you do this, we will try to stop you by whatever means we feel that we need, but we will do it with love and compassion. We will try to stop you, to prevent you from doing whatever you try to do to us and to your victims, but that does not mean that we are acting with hatred or anger. No, we do that with love. If you know how to go in that direction, we will support you wholeheartedly because it is our desire, our hope, that you move in the direction of harmony, of nondiscrimination, of social equality."

We have to make it very clear, because in that person there is a friend, and there is an enemy in him or in her at the same time. The enemy is the negative seeds, and the friend is the positive seeds. We should not kill the friend in him, we should only kill the enemy in him; and to kill the enemy in him is to recognize the negative seed in him and try to transform it, to not allow the situation to be favorable for the continuation of crime and destruction.

So that is a strategy, because to practice you need a strategy. You need a lot of intelligence, of deep looking, and you also need a lot of compassion and love. In the context of social change, we have to practice together. We have to unite our insights. We have to bring our compassion and insight together in order to succeed. We know that only love, only compassion and understanding, can really bring a change, because hatred cannot be removed by hatred. This is something said by the Buddha in the *Dhammapada*, hatred can never be removed by hatred.

[Bell]

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# Healing is Possible Through Resting

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Good morning, my dear friends.

Welcome to the third week of our summer opening. Today is the thirtieth of July 1997, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We have been practicing pebble meditation during the past two weeks, and I hope that the children who just arrived yesterday and today will continue with our practice of the six pebbles. There are children who have been here for the last two weeks, and they will show you how to practice pebble meditation. You'll have to make a small bag like this, and find six pebbles like this, little pebbles. Wash them very carefully, dry them, and put them into the bag.

Today we will learn a short poem together, young people and also less young people. We are going to use the pebbles to practice the poem also. It would be wonderful if you can memorize the short poem in order to practice. Many of you know it by heart already, but there may be a few of you who have not been introduced to the practice of this poem: "In, out. Deep, slow. Calm, ease. Smile, release. Present moment, wonderful moment." I guess most of us can sing it already. Shall we sing?

In, out.

Deep, slow.

Calm, ease.

Smile, release.

Present moment,

Wonderful moment.

This is a wonderful poem, because every time you practice it you'll feel much better within your body and your mind. When you are angry, when you are worried, when you suffer, if you know how to practice that poem then you will feel much better right away after one or two minutes.

I am going to remind you of the way to practice. First, “in” and “out.” It means that when I breathe in, I know I am breathing in. It’s easy. And when I breathe out, I know I am breathing out. I don’t mix the two things up. Breathing in, I know it is my in-breath. Breathing out, I know this is my out-breath. By that time, you stop all the thinking, you just pay attention to your in-breath and your out-breath. You are 100 percent with your in-breath and your out-breath.

It is like holding a baby in such a way that you hold it with 100 percent of yourself. Suppose this is a baby and I hold the baby like this. I hold the baby with 100 percent of myself. Remember, there are times when your mother holds you like this. Have you seen the image of the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus? She holds him like that: 100 percent. So here, our in-breath is our baby, and we hold our in-breath 100 percent. “Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in.” You just embrace your in-breath, nothing else. Don’t think of anything else. That is the secret of success.

When you breathe in, you just breathe in, you do nothing else. Do you think you can do that? I am asking the adults also, do you think you can do that? Just embrace your in-breath with 100 percent of yourself—mind and body together. And when you breathe out, you embrace your out-breath. You identify your in-breath as your in-breath, because when I hold my baby I know this is my baby, not something else. So, “in, out” means, “breathing in I know this is my in-breath, breathing out, I know this is my out-breath.” It’s very simple, but it’s wonderful. I am sure that if you try it, after two or three in-breaths and out-breaths you will feel much better already. I can guarantee it because I have done it and I always feel wonderful.

If you are about to cry, if you are about to kick or hit someone else because of your anger, and if you know how to go back to yourself and practice “in, out” for three times, I am sure that you’ll be different. You will not cry, you will not kick, you will not punch because you are a much better person after the practice of “in, out.” Today, try and you’ll see the power of the practice.

Then after you have practiced “In, out” three, four, or five times, you’ll feel that your in-breath has become deeper and your out-breath becomes slower. Because when you are angry, when you are in despair, when you suffer, your in-breath and out-breath are very short and not calm at all. But then after having breathed in and out peacefully, your in-breath will be very smooth. Your out-breath, also. So the quality of your breathing has been improved. Your in-breath is deeper and calmer, your out-breath is also deeper and calmer. That is why we can practice “deep and slow.”

Breathing in, I know that my in-breath has become deeper, and the deeper it is, the more pleasant it becomes. Try to practice breathing in for a few times and you'll see that it is deeper. And when it is deeper, you'll feel a lot of pleasure. When you breath out, you say, "Breathing out, I know my out-breath has become slower, slower, more peaceful." If your breath is deeper, you are deeper. If your breath is slower, you are slower. It means you are more peaceful. So, breathing in, I know that my breath has become deeper. Breathing out, I know that my breathing has become slower. It's wonderful.

You might use your pebbles also. If you are practicing sitting meditation, you put the pebbles on your left, you bow to the pebbles, and you pick up a pebble with two fingers. One pebble. You look at it and you put it in the palm of your left hand and you begin to practice breathing in, breathing out. "In, out." The practice is smooth. "In, out." Once more. "In, out." You'll feel much better. Then, I use my two fingers to take the pebble up and I put it on my right side. I have practiced "In, out" already.

Now, I'd like to practice, "Deep, slow." So, I take another pebble. I look at it. I put it in my left hand and I begin to practice. "Deep, slow." It has become deeper by itself, you don't have to make it deeper. It has become deeper by itself alone because you have practiced already three times "In, out." That is why your breath becomes deeper naturally, and slower. Let us practice together "Deep, slow" three times. "Deep, slow" [pause for three breaths]. Good, we have finished with "Deep, slow. We pick up the pebble and put it on our right side.

Now we practice the third line, "Calm, ease." It means, "Breathing in, I feel calm. Breathing out, I feel I take everything at ease." This exercise is very wonderful to practice, especially when you are nervous, when you are angry, when you don't feel peaceful in yourself. Quick, quick! You have to go back to your in-breath and out-breath and practice "Calm, ease."

This is an exercise given by the Buddha himself in a sutra called *Anapanasati Sutra, The Sutra on Mindful Breathing*. "Breathing in, I calm the mental formations in me. Breathing out, I let go." I let go of my anger. I calm my anger, I calm my worries, I calm my jealousy. And I let go of my anger, I let go of my jealousy. I think that adults have to practice together with the children. Every time the child is angry then her mother or her father should take her hand and invite her to practice. "Calm, ease." "Let us, together, practice calming and easing. 'Breathing in, I calm myself. Breathing out, I let go'" at least three times and you will feel much better.

You can begin right away with “Calm, ease” or you might begin in a classical way with “In, out” first and then “Deep, slow” and then “Calm, ease.” Either way is good. The Buddha dharma is wonderful. The moment you take the dharma up and practice you begin to feel better right away. And as you continue the practice, your quality of being always continues to improve.

I propose to you to practice three times ‘Calm, ease’ but no one prevents you from practicing more than that: four times, five times, six times, if you like it. I think you will like it because it makes you suffer less. And if you can practice eight times, ten times, you’ll feel much better. “Calm, ease.”

Then you’ll come to the fourth pebble, and that is “Smile, release. Smile, release.” “Breathing in, I smile.” You can smile now. You may feel it is very difficult to smile, too difficult to smile. But after having practiced three or four times you feel that you are able to smile. And if you can smile, you’ll feel a lot better. You may protest, “Thay, I have no joy in me, why do you want me to smile? That’s not natural.” Many people ask me like that, not only children, but grownup people. They protest, “Thay, I have no joy in me. I cannot force myself to smile, it would not be true, it would not be natural.”

I always say that a smile can be a practice, a kind of yoga practice. Yoga of the mouth: you just smile even if you don’t feel joy and you’ll see after you smile that you’ll feel differently. Sometimes the mind takes the initiative and sometimes you have to allow the body to take the initiative.

Sometimes the spirit leads, and sometimes the body can lead. This is why when you have joy, you naturally smile. But sometimes you can allow the smile to go first. You try to smile and suddenly you feel that you don’t suffer that much any more. So don’t discriminate against the body. The body also can be a leader, not only the spirit. I propose that you try this when you wake up during the night. It’s totally dark. Breath in and smile, and you’ll see. Smile to life. You are alive, you smile. This is not a diplomatic smile, because no one sees you smiling. Yet the smile is a smile of enlightenment, of joy—the joy you feel of being alive.

So smiling is a practice, a yoga practice. Don’t say, “I have no joy, why do I have to smile?” Because when you have joy and you smile, that is not practice, that’s very natural. When you don’t have joy and you smile, that is a real practice. You know there are something like 300 muscles, small and big on your face. Every time we get very angry or worried all these muscles are very tight. When people look at you with that tension on your face, they don’t see you like a flower. People are afraid of you when all the muscles on your face are tense like that. You look more like a bomb than a flower. But if you know how to smile, in just

one second, all these muscles are relaxed and your face looks like a flower again. It's wonderful.

So we have to learn to smile and then we'll look presentable right away. Look into the mirror and practice, and you'll see that the practice of the smile is very important. It brings relaxation and you can let go. You feel that you are released from the grip of the anger, of the despair.

[Bell]

On my right, there are already four pebbles. Now I'd like to practice the fifth pebble. This is the most wonderful practice. The fifth pebble can bring you a lot of joy, a lot of enlightenment, a lot of delight. That is "Present moment, wonderful moment. Present moment, wonderful moment."

This is a very deep teaching of the Buddha. The Buddha said that it is possible to live happily right here and right now. We don't have to go to the future. We don't have to go elsewhere to be happy. We can be happy right here and right now. You don't need more conditions to be happy, you have enough conditions to be happy right here and right now. If we know how to be ourselves and to look inside and around ourselves, we see that we have had enough conditions to be happy. That is the practice of living happily in the present moment.

When you breathe in, you feel that you are alive. Life is available to you, now: the blue sky, the white cloud, the green vegetation, the birds singing. Plum Village is here. Many friends are here. Your daddy is still alive, your mommy is with you, your brother is there, your sister is there. You have strong feet. You can run. You have eyes that can help you to see everything. There are many conditions for your happiness, you don't need anything else, you can be happy right away. You stop running. That is the practice. Because there are people who run all of their lives; they run because they think that happiness is not possible in the here and the now.

So this is a wonderful teaching of the Buddha. You breath in and you say "Present moment." It means, "I establish myself in the present moment. I don't run any more." This is the practice of *samata*, stopping. Stop running. I am wonderful like this in my sitting position or my walking position or even in my lying down position. It's wonderful like that I don't need to run any more. Stopping. Present moment, wonderful moment. It's wonderful that you are alive.

To be alive, that is a miracle. Imagine a person who is already dead. You might not have seen a dead person but maybe you have seen a dead bird, a dead

animal. No matter what you do, the animal cannot come back to life. Whatever you do, whatever you say, the animal is not able to listen, to hear. A dead person is also like that. She lies on the bed and no matter what you do, you cannot revive her. You cannot bring her into life again. You cry, you beat your chest, you pull your hair. But that person is already dead.

So, when you look at yourself, you see you are still alive. You see the person you love is still alive. That is wonderful. You have to wake up to that fact. The teaching of the Buddha is the teaching of waking up, waking up to see that all these wonderful things are still available. So you stop running, you establish yourself in the present moment. "Breathing in, I am in the here and in the now. Present moment. Breathing out, I feel this is a wonderful, wonderful moment."

The Buddha said life is available only in the present moment. The past is gone, the future is not yet here, you have only one moment to be alive. That is the present moment. So simple and so deep. You have an appointment with life. You should not miss that appointment. Life is most precious. You've got to meet her, you've got to be with her. And you know something, life is only available in the here and the now, in the present moment. So don't miss your appointment with life. Don't miss the present moment. That is why the fifth practice is wonderful. If you practice like that, you get a lot of joy whether you are on your cushion or on your bed or in the position of walking meditation. "Present moment, wonderful moment."

Now I would like to ask you to sing and I will practice. I practice for you. I will practice breathing in and out and I enjoy for you. Okay.

[The community sings: "In, out. Deep, slow. Calm, ease. Smile, release. Present moment, wonderful moment."]

I think by now, everyone knows the gatha by heart. I would like to tell you that this gatha is also good for practicing walking meditation. We shall do walking meditation after the talk and you may like to walk peacefully and happily with this poem. You breathe in and you make two steps. You say, "In, in." Then you breathe out and you make another two steps, "Out, out." That is walking meditation. You don't do anything else. Your mind and your body are totally for the breathing in, the breathing out, and the making of steps. You are perfectly concentrated in walking and breathing, you are not concerned with other things. And you can continue with "In, out" like that for a few minutes. If you want to walk a little bit quicker, you can make three steps while breathing in and breathing out.

You do it very naturally, in such a way that you get a lot of pleasure. Don't be so serious, so solemn. You do it very, very, very naturally. "In, in, out, out." If you enjoy walking, you feel wonderful. You are doing the practice correctly. After some time, you switch into 'Deep, slow.'" "Deep, deep, slow, slow. Deep, deep, slow, slow." Very concentrated. And we shall be walking with you. Everyone is concentrated. Everyone is peaceful. Everyone is joyful. The energy of joy and of peace will radiate from each person, and if we walk in the Sangha like that, we will receive the collective energy and it will be very, very strong.

There is still one pebble left. But for this gatha we don't need all six pebbles, we need only five. After you have practiced five gathas, your sitting meditation is done. So you hear the sound of the bell, you collect your pebble, and you put it in your small bag.

Do you think my small bag is beautiful? I like this color very much. If you want to have your bag in yellow or orange, you are welcome. Make a very beautiful pebble bag for your meditation because you are going to practice using it here. And when you go home you'll continue to use your pebble meditation bag. If the adults want to imitate, they are welcome. It's wonderful. There are those of us who have rosaries—108—and the use of the rosary is exactly like the use of the pebbles. But I think this way is fun.

So, please, young people, I think today you have a lot of things to do. Do them joyfully. I hope the children who have been here for one or two weeks will transmit the teaching of the pebble meditation to the newer children and then we will practice together. Now, when you hear the bell, please stand up and bow to the Sangha before you go out and continue the practice.

[Bell]

I would like to give a little bit more instruction about [conscious breathing]. Don't try to breathe in. Don't make any effort of breathing in. It is very important. Allow yourself to breathe in naturally. You breathe in any way, why do you have to make a determination to breathe in? That is the point. Allow yourself to breathe in normally. Only pay attention to your in-breath. Don't say, "My in-breath, come here, I will tell you how to do it." No. You allow yourself to breathe in, that's all. Short or long, you allow it to be the way it is. Be completely non-violent while holding your baby. Don't force your baby to be like this or to be like that, allow it to be as it is. Embrace it only with your mindfulness. It is very important.

When you love someone, you allow him to be or allow her to be. Don't say, "If you don't do this, I will not love you." This is already the practice of love. Allow your in-breath to be itself. Just embrace it with the energy of mindfulness. "Breathing in, I am aware that I am breathing in." That's all. The impact will be great.

Many people practice like they are in a hard labor camp. You force yourself, you make too much effort, and you tire yourself out after some time. If you know how to allow yourself to rest, to allow your in-breath and your out-breath to flow in and out naturally, you will never get tired. You only need to light up your mindfulness and to be aware of it. Like when you turn on the light, you just turn on the light. And because of the light you are aware that the bell is there, your friend is there. Awareness is like that. So you recognize your in-breath as an in-breath, your out-breath as your out-breath, and you embrace them with love.

Then in no time at all, their quality of being will be improved. Like a suffering baby who is kicking, is crying, is vibrating. You don't say, "Now, stop, don't cry, don't be agitated!" You don't say this. You don't do anything; you don't intervene. You don't force it to be the way you want. Just pick up the baby and embrace it with all your being. When you have the energy of tenderness, of love and of care, that energy will naturally penetrate into the baby and there will be a transformation. Many of you have been a mother or a father and you know this. Just hold the baby with your tenderness, with your whole presence. And that whole presence, body and mind concentrated we call mindfulness (and you are capable of being mindful, you know). So you cultivate your mindfulness so that you will be mindful more, to be there for your suffering, for yourself, for your beloved one.

In sitting meditation you do like that also. Don't struggle in order to sit. Allow yourself to sit in a relaxed way. "Smile, release." Remember, there was a time when you'd sit in your living room watching television? You could sit for one hour, even two hours? And you didn't complain that you had pain in your shoulders or arms. You just allow yourself to sit. Sitting meditation is not a struggle. If you take it to be a struggle, you'll be tired. After fifteen minutes you'll feel pain in your shoulders and in your head. So, allow yourself to rest. When you practice sitting meditation, walking meditation, allow yourself to rest. It is possible to rest while practicing walking meditation, sitting meditation, mindful breathing. In fact, this practice I offer to you as a means of resting.

Many of us take vacations. But during the time of the vacation we don't know how to rest. Then after the vacation, we are more tired. So, we now allow



ourselves to rest our body and our spirit. Here, we are learning the art of resting. Meditation as the practice of resting.

Our body has the capacity of healing itself. You know that. When you get a cut in your finger, do you have to do anything? No. You only have to keep it clean and in a few days it will be healed. Your body has a number of problems within because you have not allowed it to rest. If you know the art of total relaxation, the art of allowing your body to rest, most of these troubles will go away after a few weeks.

When an animal is wounded in the woods, it knows how to do this. It seeks a peaceful corner in the forest and it lays down for several days. Several generations of ancestors have transmitted to them the wisdom that this is the only way to restore themselves. They don't have doctors, they don't have pharmacists, but they know how to rest. They don't need to run after their prey, they don't need to eat—in fact, they fast during these three, four, five days of resting. And one day the animal is healed and it stands up and it goes to look for a source of food.

We don't know how to do like animals. In order to get well quickly we bring a lot of interventions into our body: we take a lot of drugs; we undergo a lot of treatments. But we don't know how to allow our body to rest. So learning how to allow your body to rest is a very important practice. Love your body. You learn total relaxation and you can do it several times a day. Five minutes is enough, ten minutes. Even three minutes are already very good if you know how to allow your body to rest completely.

And for your spirit, it is the same. Our consciousness is able to heal itself. It has the power of self healing but you don't allow it to rest. You continue to feed your consciousness with your anger, your worries, your thinking, and so on. You don't believe in your consciousness. You are seeking for a means to heal it but you don't know how to allow yourself to rest. You keep thinking the whole day and you keep worrying the whole day. You never allow yourself to rest. If you know how to practice total relaxation, you'll know how to smile and how to send your smile to different parts of your body. During that time, you have stopped thinking and worrying because you are focused on your body, your breathing, your walking. When you practice mindful breathing, when you practice "In, out, deep, slow," not only can you nourish yourself—body and spirit—but you can also stop your thinking. Stopping the thinking, stopping the worries, is very important.

Our mind is like a cassette tape turning nonstop day and night. We have a habit. You are not there, because you are carried away by your thinking, by your worries. You may get lost in the past, regretting the past or being caught in the suffering that you endured during the past. You suffered in the past already but now you want to suffer more by recalling the past. You call your past back in order for you to suffer more. Why do you have to show it several times, your suffering? Cows, when they eat grass, they swallow and then they bring it up again and swallow for a second time. Many of us do the same. We have suffered already in the past. But we want to bring our suffering back to the present moment and suffer more. We like that.

The future is not yet there but we think of it and we worry, and we become scared. We are not capable of dwelling in the present moment where life is. Life and its many wonders are available inside of you and around you and yet you are not able to touch its wonders because you get lost in the past, in the future, and also in your projects, your worries. How can your mind rest and restore itself? Our mind also has the capacity of self healing just as our body.

Remember when you lost someone very dear, you suffered, and you thought that you'd never restore yourself, you'd never be able to forget that suffering. You thought that the suffering would dwell with you, the wound would be with you, forever. But some time later you got used to it and you were able to go on with life. This means that your mind, your spirit, was able to heal itself.

We have to trust our spirit in the way we trust our body. Our spirit has the power of self healing if only we know how to allow it to rest and don't continue to feed it with more worries, with more projects, with more fear. The practice of mindful breathing, mindful walking, enjoying the contemplation of the sky, of the vegetation, of being with friends, enjoying things in the present moment, helps you to stop these kinds of feelings—the heart and the spirit filling with worries and fear. You will heal in the inside.

During the time you are here in Plum Village, you are surrounded by many friends who are practicing resting, recuperating themselves. Do a lot of total relaxation, mindful relaxing, walking, and sitting meditation, and enjoying doing things mindfully to help the Sangha.

[Bell]

Many of us have had the good fortune of having a loving father, a loving mother, a loving teacher, or a loving brother or sister or friend. We have to call on them

for help. Whether they are still alive or they have passed away, they are always there in you.

A father always wants to love his child. That is the deepest nature of a father. If you see that your father does not love you, it is because he was not able to manifest his love, that's all. No one had helped him to express his love. All fathers, deep inside, want to love their child. But if they say, "I hate you! I don't recognize you as my child!" that is because they do not know how to do it. It does not mean that a father does not love his child. You also, you love your children even if your children do things you consider to be negative, that irritate you. Still, deep inside you, the love you have for your children is still intact. You only need to learn how to express your love. There are many people who think that their father or their mother doesn't love them, many are victims of such a vision. But, according to my experience, all fathers love their children, deeply. All mothers, also. Even animals, they love their children.

When you look into your hand—if you look deeply—you'll see that this hand of yours is also the hand of your mother and your father. Because you are a continuation of him, you are a continuation of her. This hand has been transmitted to you by your mother, by your father. It is also the hand of your ancestors. So, don't think that this is only your hand. This is the hand of several generations. And you are going to transmit this to your children and their children.

All your wisdom, all the wisdom, all the experience, all the suffering, all the happiness of all the generations of your ancestors are here in your hand. Our ancestors, their wisdom, their happiness, their sorrow, their hope, their fear are there inside you. They all have been transmitted to you. In every cell of your body you find everything: all the hope, all the fear, all the happiness, all the suffering of all the ancestors are in each cell of you. Now mankind is capable of cloning itself. We need only to take one cell, any cell of our body, and we can duplicate ourselves.

This means that in each cell there is the presence of you as a whole. The one is the all, that is the teaching of the Buddha in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. And in each cell of our body there is hell, there is the Pure Land. There is the Buddha, there is Mara, there is Jesus, there is Satan, there is happiness, there is sorrow, in just one cell. All our ancestors can be touched, can be found in one cell, because one cell contains everything. And this is not just an abstract idea. You have heard of the technique of cloning. We know that one cell can manifest as the whole thing. So look in your own hand, and you'll see that the cells in your hand are also the cells of your father, your mother, your ancestors. Many of them were wise, were

happy. Call on these elements within yourself to come and help you and rescue you.

You have blood ancestors and you also have spiritual ancestors in yourself. If I only have blood ancestors, I cannot be myself, as I am now. Now I use my eyes in such a way that my ancestors did not. I have learned the Buddha's way of looking. I look at things with mindfulness. I look at things and touch the nature of inter-being in them. The way I look at the sky, at a pebble, as a person, is very deep. And without the Buddha, my teacher, I could not look like that. The way I breathe, the way I walk, also. My feet, walking, are also the feet of the Buddha. I am walking with the Buddha's feet. Not only do I walk with my mothers feet and my fathers feet, but also I walk with the feet of the Buddha, because each step I can generate joy and peace.

You have your beloved father in you. You have your beloved mother in you. You have your beloved teacher in you. Your teacher may be Jesus, your teacher may be Buddha, and, according to your practice, your teacher is more or less evident, powerful, in you.

Suppose you have a painful spot on your body. Why don't you call on your father, your mother, your ancestors, to come and help? Touch that painful spot with the energy of healing, of love. Because you know that deeply in him, your father loves you, deeply in her, your mother loves you, deeply in him, your teacher loves you and wants you well.

Suppose you have a tumor that might become important and the doctors say that the only way is to open you up and take it and throw it out. That is our tendency. If there is something that we don't want, we tend to cut it out and to throw it away: surgery. We have created the painful things in our body and we don't want them any more, we want to throw them out. It is the same with your mind, your consciousness. There are tumors in your consciousness, the tumor of hate, of despair, of depression. And we also want to cut and throw it out.

That is a way of life, a habit of thinking that we have learned from this new society. If you don't want anything, you eliminate it either by using a gun or a knife. We have to look deeply into our civilization and to see in what direction we are going. When we have something painful in us, we don't know how to take good care of it. We don't know how to embrace it the way we embrace our child. We want to take it, to throw it out. We want to punish it.

So, breathe in deeply, and see that this hand is the hand of your father, your loving father, or your loving mother or your loving teacher. Even if she is no

longer alive, she still is real in you because every cell in you is also her. Every cell in you is also him. Call on them to help. There are healthy cells in you, and the healthy cells will come to rescue the cells that are not so healthy. Because you do not know how to take care of them, some of them are tired and are being transformed into a problem.

So breathe in and bring your father, your mother, and your loving teacher back into your hand. You call the name of your father; the name of your teacher and suddenly your hand becomes the hand of your mother, your teacher. And then, when you breath out, touch the painful spot. Breathe slowly. Transmit all these energies to the painful spot. And after you finish, do it again. Breathe in, call his name, and you make him alive, you make her alive. The energy of your father or your teacher will be present in your hand. And when you breathe out you smile, and the energy of your father or your teacher will penetrate into you. Practice like this every day, whether in a sitting position or in a laying down position.

In the moment of your practice you are totally relaxed. You have faith in the people who love you, who want to wish you well. Then you make them present in the form of energy and you use that energy to touch and heal. Your hand has a healing power. You don't need someone else. Every one of us has a healing power within himself or herself, an energy you can generate into the palm of your hand. That energy is stored within each cell of your body. Learn to do it with your body. If you have a liver that does not work so well, that is suffering, concentrate yourself, inviting your father, your mother.

I have no doubt that my father always loved me. And I don't consider my father as nonexistent, because my father is in every cell in me. When I call on him, he is back in every cell in my body. When I generate that energy called the energy of a loving father, I touch myself and say, "Father, please help" And your father will be transmitting to you this energy. During that time you feel peaceful, knowing you are being loved, being taken care of by your father.

Remember when you were a small child, you had a fever and your tongue was so bitter you didn't want to eat anything? And your front felt like it was burning and when your mother came, she put her hand on your forehead, and suddenly you felt like you were in paradise. Just one hand. You felt much better with the presence of your mother and just one hand. Don't think that hand is no longer there. It is still there because your hand is the continuation of your mother's hand. And if you call on her, "Mommy? Please help," when you breath in and then, when you put your hand on your forehead and you breath out, you will receive exactly the same energy. Nothing is lost.

Take care of your body in such a way. Allow your body to rest in whatever position you are. And later you will be able to take care of your spirit, your ailing spirit, in the same way. You have blocks of pain, of sorrow, of fear, of despair within yourself. You have to embrace these blocks of pain and sorrow exactly in the same way. Call on them to help.

The Buddha-to-be is not something abstract. The Buddha is very deep in me because I have learned the practice. I have learned to look in the way the Buddha looked. I have learned to breathe the way the Buddha breathed. I have learned to walk in the way the Buddha walked. On the Gridhrakuta Mountain where the Buddha stayed more than twenty years, I sat there and I contemplated the very sunset that he had contemplated. I was looking with my eyes and his eyes at the beautiful sunset.

You also are capable of looking with your Buddha eyes. In your daily life you are used to looking with your eyes, the eyes that do not have the energy of mindfulness and concentration behind them. But with your mindful breathing, you can generate the Buddha eyes in you. When you use these eyes to look, you will see things much differently. It is like having a pair of binoculars and if you bring them up to your eyes, you can see differently. So, you have the Buddha eyes transmitted to you by your teacher. Why don't you use them? Just breathing in, breathing out, generates the energy of mindfulness and suddenly, you have the Buddha eyes. Looking with the Buddha eyes, you will not get angry. You will despair.

You should not have any complex. The Buddha is enough, Jesus is enough. Jesus said so, "I am in the father, the father is in me, I am in you, and you are in me." Very clear. You can't deny that teaching in the heart of Christianity.

So, if the Buddha is in you, why don't you call on him for help? You just breathe in and breathe out and Buddha will be alive, you can use Buddha eyes, Buddha hands. "Dear Buddha, please help," and suddenly you have the hand of the Buddha available to you. How simple. What else do you practice? What else do you learn? This is very simple, easy to understand, and yet very deep. The healing that you want, you can provide by yourself. You are supported by the Sangha, by the Dharma, by the Buddha, every moment of your daily life. If only you know this, you will realize that support is always available and then you will not feel alone and scared.

So today, in the Dharma discussion, please discuss this practice. Allow us to rest. Allow our body to rest. There are techniques of resting. You may not be used to them but they are good habits to learn. We have learned the other kind of habit

of not resting, and now we have to learn a positive habit to be able to rest—bodily and mentally. And we have to share with each other the ways we do this to arrive at a relaxed state of the body and of the mind.

Walking is a way of resting, sitting is a way of resting, eating is a way of resting. Don't struggle. We have struggled all our lives; we have gone nowhere at all. Stop the struggle and take care of our body, our mind. Practice resting and restoring ourselves and we'll go very far.

We will get together and discuss this. We will share our experience of the practice of resting. There are brothers and sisters who have been in the practice longer, they can share their practice. You may ask questions. And we practice the first day, the second day, and then we'll meet again and share again our practice. If you have any difficulties, if you have any questions, or if you have some success, some joy in your practice, please share these with other people.

We practice as a Sangha. There are dharma teachers available in our midst, there are also brothers and sisters who are familiar with the teaching and the practice. So do profit from their presence.

And when you feel concentrated and mindful, and you enjoy your practice of walking, of breathing, of smiling, then you'll contribute a lot to the Sangha. Because if we see you relaxed, walking mindfully, smiling, breathing mindfully, we will be reminded to do the same. Together, we'll produce that collective energy that will nourish us. When we go home, we can continue the practice even with our children. Because the children in Plum Village proved that they are capable of the practice.

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# The Island of Self; The Three Dharma Seals

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Dear Sangha, good morning. Today is the 28<sup>th</sup> of July 1998, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We are going to speak English today.

When I was a small boy, at the age of seven or eight, I happened to see a drawing of the Buddha on the cover of a Buddhist magazine. The Buddha was sitting on the grass, very peacefully, very beautifully, and I was very impressed. The artist must have had a lot of peace within himself, so that when he drew the Buddha, the Buddha was so peaceful. Looking at the drawing of the Buddha made me happy, because around me people were not very calm, or very happy. When I saw the drawing of the Buddha I was very impressed, and I suddenly had the idea that I wanted to become someone like him, someone who could sit very still and peacefully. I think that was the moment that I first wanted to become a monk, but I did not know that. I wanted to be like the Buddha.

You know that the Buddha is not a god, the Buddha was just a human being like all of us, and he suffered very much as a teenager. He saw the suffering in his kingdom, he saw how his father King Shuddhodana was trying hard to make the suffering less, but he seemed to be helpless. So the political way did not seem to him to be a very effective one. As a teenager the young Siddhartha was trying to find a way out of the situation of suffering. He was always searching and searching for the way. I think that today many young people also do as the young Siddhartha did: you look around yourselves, you don't see anything really beautiful, really good, and really true, so you are confused. You are searching, looking very hard to see whether there is something really beautiful, really good or really true to embrace and follow.

I was very young, and yet I did have that kind of feeling in me. That is why, when I saw the drawing of the Buddha, I was so happy. I just wanted to be like him. And I was told that if you practice well, you can be like a Buddha. The Buddha is not a god; the Buddha is just a human being like us. Anyone that is peaceful, loving and understanding can be called a Buddha. There were many Buddhas in the past, there are Buddhas in the present moment, and there will be many Buddhas in the future. Buddha is not the name of someone; Buddha is just a common name, to designate someone who has a high degree of peace, who has a high degree of understanding and compassion.

When I was about eleven, I went for a picnic on the mountain of Na Son, together with several hundred boys and girls from my school. I was very excited about that picnic, because I learned that we were going to climb the mountain Na Son, and on the top was a monk, who lived there as a hermit and practiced in order to become a Buddha. I had had picnics before, but this one was so special, because I knew that if I climbed to the top of the mountain I would see the hermit, see someone who was practicing in order to become like a Buddha. So that was my secret hope, to be able to meet with the hermit. A hermit is someone who practices alone, who does not want to be disturbed, and who wants to devote all of his time to the practice.

At that time I did not know anything about the practice of mindful breathing, or mindful walking; I did not know what walking meditation was. We organized in teams of five boys, and we brought with us a few bottles of boiled water, and rice balls. We squeezed cooked rice into the shape of bread, and it was so compact that you could cut the rice into slices, and you would eat your rice with sesame seeds, crushed roast peanuts, and a little bit of salt. I think that in Plum Village you'll have to organize that kind of picnic some day--just a slice of rice, eaten with

sesame seeds—it's very delicious. Since I did not know how to practice walking meditation, we tried to climb as quickly as possible. We got very tired. We had hardly come halfway up the mountain before we were exhausted, and the worse thing was that we had drunk all our water. We got very thirsty. So we tried our best, and when we had climbed to the top, we were completely exhausted, and thirsty; and we were given the order to prepare our picnic.

I did not care a lot about eating. I wanted to go and look for the hermit. But it was very disappointing—someone told me that the hermit was not there. Imagine my disappointment! A hermit is someone who wants to be alone in his hut. Imagine...he learned that three or four hundred children were coming! So he must have gone somewhere and hidden himself. I believed that the hermit was still somewhere there in the woods, and that if I ventured into the woods I might have a chance to see him and talk to him. So I left my friends, my *copains*, there, and I went alone into the forest. The forest was large, and there was not much chance of meeting someone who wanted to hide himself in it.

A few minutes after I went into the forest, I began to hear the sound of dripping water. The sound was so clear, so nice--like the sound of a piano. It was so interesting that I tried to go in the direction of the sound. Very soon after that I discovered a very beautiful natural well, made of blocks of stone. The water was very high, and when I saw the water, so clear, so refreshing, I was so happy, because I was extremely thirsty. To see the water was something wonderful. So I came close to the well, I looked down, and I could see every detail at the bottom of the well. The water was so limpid. I used my hand to cup the water and I drank it. It was so delicious; I cannot describe to you how delicious it was. I had never drunk anything like that. Believe me, it was much better than Coca-Cola, even Coca-Cola with ice.

After having drunk the water from the well, I felt completely satisfied. At that time I could not describe my feeling, but now I think I can describe my feeling: it was the feeling of being completely satisfied, when you don't have any more desire, even the desire to meet the hermit. Very strange—why? Because in that moment, as a small boy, I believed that the hermit had transformed himself into a well so that I could meet him privately, in a kind of private audience with the hermit. You know, I had been reading a lot of fairy tales, so I really believed that the hermit had transformed himself into a well so that I could meet him personally. So I felt very privileged; I felt that I was the only one who could have that wonderful opportunity of meeting the hermit. Then I sat very close to the stones, and I lay down and looked at the sky. The sky was very blue. I remember also seeing a few leaves of a branch that was close by, hanging across the sky. Just a minute later, I fell into a very deep sleep.

I don't know how long I slept, but the sleep must have been very deep, because when I woke up I did not know where I was. I had to look around to realize that I was on the top of the Na Son Mountain. The space was so special, the circumstances so special: I alone was allowed into that space to have that wonderful encounter with the hermit in the form of a well. I did not want to leave the well. I wanted to stay up there, but I remembered that my friends must have been waiting for me. I had just suddenly disappeared, and that could have made them very worried. So I had to leave the natural well with a lot of regret. On my way down, suddenly a sentence came to my head, not in Vietnamese, but in French: "I have tasted the most wonderful water in the world." That water may symbolize a kind of spiritual experience.

When I arrived, my friends asked me where I had been. I did not say anything—I did not tell them anything. I don't know why. It seems that I wanted to keep the event as something sacred; I did not want to share. I had the impression that if I told them about that, I would lose something. That is why I was not talkative at all, that afternoon. You know, my first experience with a Buddha was seeing the drawing on the cover of a Buddhist magazine, of someone sitting on the grass, very peacefully. My second encounter with the Buddha was when I was on the top of the Mountain Na-Son, and drinking the water from that natural well. Later on, when I was twelve, I made the determination that I would ask permission of my mother and father to become a monk, and I kept that secret for many years. It was when I was about sixteen that I formally made a request, and it was very fortunate that my parents agreed.

I have told you that Siddhartha, before he became a Buddha, had already suffered a lot as a young man, a teenager. He was looking very hard to see a path by which he could bring happiness to himself and to many people around him, a path which could help him to transform and to reduce the amount of suffering that he could see in himself and around him.

(Bell)

I know that the young people must be confused from time to time. I understand them. I know that by looking around they may not see something beautiful, something really true or good to follow. Your feeling is like the feeling of Siddhartha Gautama before he became the Buddha. That kind of search is legitimate. It is very hard to be there when you don't really see something truly beautiful, truly good. So many young people in our time do not know what to do with their lives, just because they don't see any meaning to their lives. That is why they live in a way that can destroy them, both physically and mentally. I would like to invite the young people to inquire about the Buddha as a young man, as someone who was searching for some meaning for his life. The Buddha practiced, got insight, and with that insight and compassion he spent forty-five years helping the people of his time, and after his passing away he continued to serve. Many people today consider themselves to be the students of the Buddha, practicing in a way that makes it possible for understanding and compassion to be born in their hearts. When you have understanding and compassion in your heart, your life has a meaning. You can relate to all living beings around you, and you know that you can do something; you can be something, that can help relieve the suffering around you.

Yesterday I got a request from a magazine in North America. I don't know if you know of the magazine called *Self*. That is a magazine for young women in the United States. Arnie says that the circulation of that magazine is very large: every month they print 1,100,000 copies. They wanted me to write something about freedom. They asked, "Thay, do you think that genuine freedom is possible when suffering is still going on around you? Is it possible to be truly free when so much suffering is going on around you?" I wrote about ten lines, and I said that suffering is part of life, and suffering has a role to play in life, because it is only against the background of suffering that we can identify happiness and well being. If we have not suffered, we have no chance to experience happiness and well-being. So suffering is something that can help us to identify happiness and well-being. To believe in a place where there is only happiness, where there is no suffering at all--to me this is very naïve. Even if it is truly happiness, without suffering there is no means to identify it as happiness. If you have never been hungry, then you cannot experience the joy of having something to eat. If you have not been away from your beloved one, missing him or her a lot, you cannot recognize the joy of being close to that person. That is why happiness and suffering "inter-are."

Also I said that most of the suffering that exists is due to the fact that we are so ignorant. Most of the suffering that we endure comes from our craving, our anger, our hate, our discrimination, and our delusions. If you can get rid of these afflictions in yourself, you can remove a lot of suffering, in yourself and around you. If you practice the teaching of your spiritual tradition, you will be able to develop understanding and compassion within you, and the amount of freedom you enjoy can be measured by the amount of understanding and compassion you have in your heart. If you have more understanding and compassion, then your freedom will be greater. With understanding and compassion in you, you can always help to relieve the suffering around you. Because of that, you are no longer afraid of suffering. You do not allow yourself to be drowned in the ocean of suffering; you do not allow suffering to overwhelm you, because you already know how to transform the suffering within you and around you. You are even capable of smiling at your own sufferings, and the suffering around you, because that smile proves that you have confidence in your capacity to transform it. That smile is born from your awareness that suffering is there, but you can be something, you can do something, in order to remove the suffering around you every day, every hour. That is why freedom is possible. I insist that the amount of freedom you enjoy can be measured by the amount of understanding and compassion that you have in your heart.

I would like to tell the young people that there are ways to live your life so that you can bring more understanding and compassion into your heart. Understanding and compassion are something truly beautiful. If you look deeply into yourself and around you, you will see that the seed of understanding and compassion is in everyone, and if we know the practice, the way of mindful living, then we will be able to generate the energy of understanding and compassion in ourselves. We can recognize what is beautiful, what is true, what is good, in us and around us, and our lives suddenly have a meaning. You are there in order to help, to help relieve the suffering and to bring joy to our daily life. If you have a purpose, a meaning to your life, you will know how to protect yourself, how to protect your body, to protect your mind from the destruction that is going on around you. Your life, your body, and your consciousness will become an instrument for peace, for compassion, and when you protect yourself, when you protect your body and your mind, you help protect all of us. You protect your children, you protect your ancestors, and that is why I would like to tell the young people today that the roots of goodness, the roots of beauty, the roots of truth are within us. If we know how to practice mindful living, then we can touch these wonderful factors in us, and we will be like Siddhartha Gautama, we will see a path to follow, the path of understanding, the path of love that can help reduce the suffering in the world every day.

I have met my hermit in the form of a well. You may have met your hermit also, but you might not have recognized it. Your hermit may have been in the form of a tree, a rock, or a person. I think the moment when we meet the hermit of our life we are transformed, we know where to go. That was my case--when I met my hermit, I knew where I had to go. That is why I asked my parents to allow me to become a monk. Becoming a monk is just one way; there are many other ways that are equally beautiful. So I wish that every one of you here would be able to meet your hermit very soon. And you must be very attentive in order not to miss him, because you might meet him, and yet not recognize him. The hermit can appear to you at any time. But if you are mindful, if you are attentive, when your hermit appears, you will be able to recognize him at once. It would be a joy for me if, someday when you meet the hermit, you will write me a letter, saying "Thay, today I have met my hermit, and I'm very happy, I know where to go now." Don't forget to do that. When you hear the small bell, you may stand up, and bow to the Sangha before leaving the meditation hall.

(Bell)

The Buddha said that every one of us has an island within, an island of peace and stability within, and we should practice so that we can profit from the existence of that island within ourselves. When he was eighty, the Buddha knew that he was going to pass away in a few months, and he knew that his disciples were going to miss him. During the last six months, around the city of Vaisali, he used to talk to the monks and the nuns about taking refuge within yourself. The expression is *atadipa*. *Ata* means self, *dipa* means island. When you go back to that island, you experience peace and stability. The Buddha is there, the Dharma is there, and the Sangha is there.

We can describe the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha as forms of energy. Mindfulness is the kind of energy that helps us to be really there in the present moment, body and mind united. Mindfulness is the kind of energy that helps us to touch life deeply in the present moment. Buddha is my mindfulness, shining near, shining far. So when you have the energy of mindfulness in yourself, the Buddha is present, and light is there. With mindfulness you can see the situation more clearly, and you know exactly what to do and what not to do. We know that the practice of mindful breathing can maintain your mindfulness alive as long as you wish. Or the practice of walking meditation can also maintain mindfulness alive as long as you wish. So you might like to keep the Buddha with you, to invite him to stay with you as long as you like, by the practice of mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful sitting. Because that is an energy for your protection. Buddha is not an abstract idea Buddha is something very real. Your Buddha nature is your capacity of being mindful, calm and concentrated. So you have confidence in the Buddha, because you know that you are capable of generating the energy of mindfulness in you. What makes a Buddha a Buddha is the energy of mindfulness. Mindfulness carries within itself the energy of calm concentration, and if mindfulness is there for some time, insight is born. That is why mindfulness, concentration and insight go together. So, in your island you have the Buddha. Visualize a beautiful island within yourself, with beautiful trees, clear streams of water, birds, all your ancestors, spiritual or blood, and you can encounter the Buddha, you can take the hand of the Buddha and walk on that island. It is possible. When you are mindful you are a Buddha at the same time. Taking the hand of the Buddha and walking is something you can do every day.

Be an island unto yourself. "As an island unto myself, Buddha is my mindfulness, shining near, shining far. Dharma is my breathing, guarding body and mind." The Dharma is there in the island, and I can deeply touch the Dharma inside of me. The Dharma not as a talk, not as a book, but the living Dharma; because when you practice mindful breathing, you are generating the living Dharma, the Dharma that does not need words. When you are practicing mindfulness of breathing or walking, you yourself become the living Dharma. When we see you, we see the Dharma. And if you teach, you don't teach with your mouth, you teach with your body, your breath, your steps. So the living Dharma is something real, not something abstract. You can afford to have the Dharma anytime you want, available twenty-four hours a day, if you care to touch it. Dharma is my breathing, protecting body and mind. Because mindful breathing helps mindfulness to stay alive. The energy of mindfulness is an energy of protection. We know that the energy of mindfulness generated by ourselves can protect us, but the mindfulness generated by a Sangha...

Imagine one thousand, two thousand, three thousand people, practicing walking meditation and enjoying every step they make. A lot of energy is born from that kind of collective practice. I usually organize a day of mindfulness in a practice center called Spirit Rock in northern California, and we usually have 2500 or 3000 people doing walking meditation or sitting meditation together. The collective energy of mindfulness is very wonderful, powerful. If you happen to be in that crowd, and if you open yourself for that energy to penetrate into you, you can get healing, you can get transformation. That is why the energy of mindfulness, whether individual or collective, is the Buddha protecting you. We should practice in order to touch the Buddha and the Dharma several times a day, in our daily

lives. The Sangha is also available. First of all the five elements within us--form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness, the five Skandhas--may be in disharmony with each other when you don't practice. Illnesses, disease, are born when the five elements are in contradiction, in disharmony. But when you begin to practice mindfulness of breathing, the energy of mindfulness generated from the practice of mindful breathing begins to reorganize the Five Elements. The Five Elements begin to come together and operate in harmony, and that is a Sangha, the Sangha within. Sangha means harmony, a community living in harmony. So we look into our person, and we recognize the five elements of our person. The physical aspect is form, and then there are the feelings, the perceptions, the mental formations and the consciousnesses. Under the supervision and the guidance of mindful breathing the Five Elements begin to come together and operate in harmony. Your territory begins to be surveyed by mindfulness, and you know how to restore peace and harmony within your kingdom of the Five Elements. The Sangha is inside, it is not only around you, but it is inside. Therefore, when you go back to the island of self with mindfulness, you have a wonderful refuge. In difficult moments, you should be able to dwell in security in that kind of island. Make it available, learn to enjoy and to make use of that island within yourself. That is the recommendation made by Buddha when he was eighty.

Suppose there is a storm raging—you don't mind, because your house is solid. You close all the doors and windows, and although the wind is blowing fiercely outside, and there is rain and thunder, you still feel safe within your home. The island of self is like that. You have to practice, to learn, in order to allow that shelter, that island within yourself to appear for your use. During your daily life, learn to dwell in that safe island of mindfulness within you. Then you will be protected from provocations, you will be protected from anger, and from despair. There are many elements around you that are ready to invade you, to attack you and to deprive you of your peace and stability. So you have to organize in order to protect yourself, and to build up the practice of dwelling in that island of self is the practice recommended by the Buddha.

In the position of sitting, of walking, while you are doing the cooking, of the washing, please learn to dwell in that island of self, and feel safe when you do these things. When you need to go out of the house you can still carry that island of self with you, and everywhere you go you will feel safe, because you have a safe island to protect you. Nothing can assail you anymore, because you have that island of self, available every moment. During your sleep that island is also available. Before going to sleep, you can go back to that island and feel comfortable there. No one can remove that island of safety from you. They can steal your money, they can steal your car, but they can never steal that safe island within yourself. It is possible to tell the young people to practice this same way. They are very vulnerable when they go out into society, and if they don't have a refuge inside, it is very easy for them to get into despair. Please practice taking refuge in the island of self, and help the young people to do the same.

Every time you have a strong emotion, like anger or despair, it is as though you are exposed to a storm. Look at the tree outside the window. She is trying her best to stand in the storm. When you look at the top of the tree, you see that several small branches and leaves are swaying back and forward very violently in the wind, and you have the feeling that they could be broken at any time. We feel very much the same when we are exposed to the storm of emotions. We feel that we may die because the emotion is so strong—the fear, the despair, the anger, the unhappiness—but if you look down a little, you see that the trunk of the tree is firmly rooted in the soil, and then you have another impression. You know that the tree is going to stand in the storm. We are like trees also. On this level we are very vulnerable. So during the storms of emotion, if you dwell on this level, the level of the brain, the level of the heart, you might be broken, you might feel that you are not going to be able to stand it, you are going to die. But bring your attention, down, down, to the navel, a little bit below the navel, and pay attention to the rising and falling of your stomach, practicing mindful breathing. When you breathe in your stomach will rise, and when you breathe out, your stomach will fall. To stop all the thinking, to just focus all your attention on the rise and fall of your stomach, and to dwell there at the root of your tree, and not to float up here at the level of the heart or the brain, is a very important practice. If you can do that for ten minutes, or fifteen minutes, the emotion will go away and you survive the storm. And if you can survive the storm once, you have confidence. The next time that depression comes, when a strong emotion comes, you will do the same. And that confidence is very important in you.

We should know that we are more, much more than our emotions. An emotion is something that comes, stays for some time, and goes. Things are impermanent. Nothing can be permanent. Your emotion is not going to stay there forever. You know that you are more than your emotions. Why do you have to die because of one emotion? But so many young people, when they are overwhelmed by their emotions, have the feeling that they cannot stand it, and the only way to stop the suffering is to go and kill themselves. That is why the number of young people who commit suicide in our times is so high: they don't know how to handle their emotions. It's not very difficult – to be

aware that the emotion is just an emotion. It is born, it stays for some time, and it will go away. Why do you have to die because of it? You are much more than your emotions.

If you know how to practice taking good care of your tree during a storm, you will be all right. If you continue to think, to imagine, and if you give yourself up to the feeling, you will be blown away. You need to know how to go down to your roots and concentrate all your mind into mindful breathing and into the rise and fall of your abdomen. The best position is the sitting position, because in that position you are more solid. I am sure that after about a dozen, or twenty minutes, your emotion will go away, and you will have proved that you are stronger than your emotion. But please don't wait until a strong emotion comes in order to practice, because by that time you will have forgotten the practice. So, please try right now, every day, and spend a number of minutes practicing that way. After some time, perhaps twenty-one days, you will have the habit, and if an emotion comes you will remember to practice. If you have overcome once, you will have a tremendous confidence in your capacity of dealing with the emotions. You have to be capable of doing that, and show it to the young people, that is it is okay to have an emotion, and that we can take care of our emotions. We can teach the young people to do it, even if they are still very young: "Darling, you sit with Mommy. I will hold your hand. Let us not think of anything; let us pay attention to our bellies. Breathing in, it is rising; breathing out, it is falling." And you can use your mindfulness to support your child, and both you and your child can practice together. She will develop confidence also, because after that the crisis will go away, and she will have faith in the practice. Try your best to put into practice the teaching of the Buddha, going back to the island of self, enjoying the island of self. Then when you feel agitated, when you feel insecure, when you feel unstable, just follow your in-breath and out-breath, and come back to that island of self, and you'll feel all right. These practices are not complicated—just the good habit of doing that and you have your refuge.

In Buddhism we speak of taking refuge in the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. But to me, taking refuge is not a matter of belief. It is a matter of practice. Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are not abstract things, things that exist only in the cloud. Buddha is the energy of mindfulness that you do have, even if it's not sufficient yet; you know that if you continue the practice you will cultivate more of it for your protection. Dharma...you know that you can transform yourself into living Dharma if you know how to live your daily life mindfully, the art of mindful living. And Sangha...you know you can coordinate, you can restore harmony between different elements within yourself, and between you and other members of the community. So Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are very concrete, you can touch them with your finger, or with your feet. The island of safety is made of these elements, and to practice like that is to practice protecting yourself and protecting your beloved ones. If you are safe, then you can help another person to be safe. Remember when the plane is about to take off: the flight attendant always reminds you that if it should happen that there is not enough oxygen to breathe, oxygen masks will be available and you should put on your oxygen mask first, before helping your child. This is the same thing. You have to make the island of self available to yourself first, and then you can help the people in your family, your beloved one, to enjoy the same practice.

(Bell)

In our midst there is a lady who has cancer. She has been coming to Plum Village every year and practicing, and every time she gets back the quality of her blood is always much better than if she had stayed in her own country. It is a pity that she cannot stay here, because I know that to be here, practicing with a Sangha and living a simple life, would help her very much with her health. She wrote to me, "Thay, I am very grateful for the practice, for the Dharma, for the teaching. I see its value, its effectiveness. I want to live I don't want to die. I am still very young." I think this is partly the question of the environment. Our society is organized in such a way that we live our daily lives without a lot of peace and stability, and there is a lot of stress. So the question of changing the environment, whether to go somewhere else, or whether to work together with other friends to transform the environment where we find it, is very important. Bring more elements of the Pure Land into your place. Maybe elements of your Pure Land are hidden somewhere there, somewhere very close to you. Discover them, and make them available in your immediate surroundings. With some practice of looking deeply, we might effect some changes in our environment, so that the place will be safer to live, and healing can take place more easily. This is the problem of Sangha building. That is why, during all of the retreats that we offer in Europe and North America, we always urge people to meet to discuss Sangha building, and also the work of improving the environment.

All of us want to live we don't want to die. But the question of living and dying is a deep question within Buddhism, and the practice of looking deeply can show us that it's not possible for us to die, because our true nature is the nature of no-birth and no-death. Birth and death are just two aspects of the same reality. Without

dying, birth cannot take place. We know that many of the cells in our body die every day. If they didn't die, how could life be possible? How could the new cells be born? So birth and death help each other to be possible. If we had to mourn and cry and organize funerals every time a cell died in our bodies, we would not have time left to do anything else.

When you come to a Buddhist practice center, you might learn ways to relieve some of your suffering, such as fear, despair, anger, agitation, and so on. You may learn ways to improve your relationship with the other person, but the greatest relief you get is by touching your own nature, your true nature of no-birth and no-death, and that is the ultimate purpose of Buddhist meditation. We know that meditation means to stop, to be there, to be calmer, to be more concentrated, so that you can look deeply into what is there in the here and the now. You can see deeply into the true nature of reality. The insight you get will liberate you from your fear, your suffering. Looking deeply is the phrase we use to translate *vipashyana*, translated sometimes as "insight meditation." You practice in order to get insight into the true nature of reality. That practice can be described simply as the practice of looking deeply. But how to look deeply? Do you have to use your thinking? Or do you have to refrain from thinking in order to really practice looking deeply?

You have to touch your nature to know who you truly are. In the beginning we have talked about the wave, and the water. We know that a wave can live her life as a wave, but she can also live her life as water at the same time. It would be a pity if a wave did not know that she is water. To be a wave is wonderful, but to be a non-wave is also wonderful. I have asked the children to draw a wave, and after that to draw water for me. Water can be a wave, but water can be a non-wave, and water can be very, very still, to the point that she can reflect the blue sky and the clouds and the trees perfectly. We can enjoy being a wave, but we can enjoy just being still water. Where can we find that stillness? Does it exist in the wave? Yes, because you cannot take the wave out of the water, and therefore, touching the wave deeply, you touch the water in within it, and you know that if you can touch the water, you can touch the capacity of being still. No one denies the fact that water can be still. So the capacity of being still, the capacity of reflecting things as they are, you know that is in the water. The Buddha nature, the capacity of understanding, of loving, of being non-fear, of being liberated, we have it deep within ourselves. So once we have touched that true nature within ourselves, we can transcend all kinds of fear. We know that being a wave is wonderful, but being a non-wave is also beautiful.

I want to live, yes that is the truth, but who forbids you to live? If you don't live in this form, then you will live in another form. When the time comes for the cloud to become rain, if the cloud is wise, the cloud will not be upset, or be scared, because the cloud knows that being a cloud floating in the sky is wonderful, but being the rain falling on the ocean, on the mountain, on the field, is also wonderful. When you have touched that nature of no-birth and no-death in you, you can remove your fear, you can remove your anguish, your suffering. The ultimate purpose of Buddhist meditation is to touch your true nature of no-birth and no-death. That true nature is sometimes called *nirvana*.

Nirvana means extinction. Extinction of what? Extinction of notions such as being and non-being, birth and death, one and many. We have created all these notions that become the ground of all our suffering and our fear. Because we have not been able to touch the true nature of our being, we are caught by these pairs of opposites. To die, what does it mean? In our minds it means that you are someone, and then suddenly you become no one. You are something; suddenly you become nothing—that is our idea of death. But if we observe things deeply, we see nothing like that in reality. There is nothing that can be reduced to nothing, or to nothingness. Can you reduce a cloud into nothingness? No, you can only help the cloud to become rain. You can help the rain to become snow. But you cannot make a cloud into nothingness. A sheet of paper—can you reduce it into nothingness? No. You may burn it, and it is transformed in many ways. Part of it will become a cloud, the smoke rising. Part of it will become the heat, penetrating into the cosmos. Part of it will become ash that can be reborn as a flower or a blade of grass, sometime later. So everything is on their way, on their journey of manifestation of being. You are also like that. If you don't manifest yourself in this form, then you manifest yourself in another form. Please don't be afraid of being nothing. Nothingness is just an idea. Non-being is just an idea. The Buddha said not only is non-being an idea, but being is also an idea. Reality transcends both being and non-being.

When conditions are sufficient, something manifests itself, and you describe it as being. But when the conditions are not sufficient, and it has not manifested, you describe it as non-being. That is wrong. It's like when you look into space, into the air. You don't see any color, you don't hear any sound, you don't see anything, but if you have a radio or a television set, you will capture radio or television programs, and sights and sounds will manifest themselves. So the radio or the television set is just one more condition enabling you to see the signals manifest.

Signals are reaching us all the time, signals from satellites, and because we lack one condition, we believe that they do not exist, but they do exist. So our notion of being is also a notion. And our notion of non-being is another notion. Reality transcends both being and non-being. That is the teaching of the Buddha in so many, many discourses. The typical sentence is like this: when conditions are sufficient, your body manifests, and you say that the body "is". And when conditions are not longer sufficient, and your body does not manifest itself, then you say that there is no body. Your idea of "there is" and "there is not" are just ideas. Your true nature is free from these two ideas: being and non-being. That is why, within the teachings of the Buddha, to be or not to be, that is not the question. The Buddha helps us to practice stopping, concentrating, calming, in order to be able to direct our looking deeply into the heart of things, to discover the true nature of reality, the nature of no birth, no death, no being, no non-being, no coming, no going. If you come to a practice center, and you don't learn anything about that practice, it would be a pity.

The Buddha offered us a teaching called the teaching about the Three Dharma Seals. A seal is something that you use to certify that something is authentic it is not a fake. So every teaching that does not bear the mark of the Three Dharma Seals cannot be described as an authentic Buddhist teaching. I would like to tell you something about this teaching today, because some of you have to leave tomorrow.

Impermanence, *Anitya*, is the first Dharma Seal. Any teaching that does not bear the mark of impermanence is not a Buddhist teaching. What does impermanence mean in the context of the Buddha's teaching? Impermanence means that everything is changing all the time. Nothing can remain the same in two consecutive moment--you also. The "you" of this minute is no longer the "you" of a minute ago. So you are not identical to yourself in two consecutive moments. Intellectually, we understand that, but practically, we don't behave as if we have seen that truth. When you live with someone close to you, you might practice impermanence, because impermanence should not be a theory, it should be a practice, an insight. You dwell in the concentration of impermanence when you know that you are impermanent, and so is the person who lives with you. You don't know what will happen to you tomorrow, or what will happen to her tomorrow. That is why you cherish this present moment as the most important moment, and you know that everything you can do to make her happy today, you do it, without waiting until tomorrow. Many of us live in such a way that it seems as if the other person is going to be there for one million years, and she will remain the same for ever and ever. That is ignorance that is the absence of the insight of impermanence. So the insight of impermanence helps you to be aware that if there are things you can do today to make him happy, you should do them right away. This present moment is a wonderful moment when you can feel life as something real. You don't wait until tomorrow in order to live your life, because you know that this moment is a very special moment. It is available, and you are able to recognize it as the only moment when you are able to live deeply. So you touch life deeply in that moment, because you have the insight of impermanence. You cherish the presence of the person you love in this very moment, because she is available only in the here and the now.

Impermanence is not something pessimistic, because impermanence is the very ground of life. If things were not impermanent, life would not be possible. If things were not impermanent, your daughter could not grow up, she would remain like that for ever. If things were not impermanent, the dictatorial regime would remain like that forever. If things were not impermanent, the grain of corn that you sowed yesterday would remain a grain of corn for the whole year. It is because of impermanence that life is possible. If things are impermanent, it is possible for you to transform your pain and your suffering. So impermanence is good. You suffer not because things are impermanent, you suffer because things are impermanent but you believe them to be permanent. That is why the insight on impermanence helps you not to suffer too much. Impermanence is an insight, a concentration, a *samádhi*. You can dwell in the insight of impermanence, and you will become a very wise person. So if impermanence is a *samádhi*, a concentration, an insight, you should not deal with it as a theory. You have to live with it. One who keeps the insight of impermanence alive within himself can avoid making a lot of mistakes and can bring a lot of happiness to the people who live around him.

(Bell)

What is non-self, *Anattá* (Pali)? It means impermanence. If things are impermanent, they don't remain the same things forever. You of this moment are no longer you of a minute ago. There is no permanent entity within us, there is only a stream of being. There is always a lot of input and output. The input and the output happen in every second, and we should learn how to look at life as streams of being, and not as separate entities. This is a very profound teaching of the Buddha. For instance, looking into a flower, you can see that the flower is made of many elements that we can call non-flower elements. When you touch the flower, you touch the cloud. You cannot remove the cloud from the flower, because if you could remove the cloud from the flower, the flower would



collapse right away. You don't have to be a poet in order to see a cloud floating in the flower, but you know very well that without the clouds there would be no rain and no water for the flower to grow. So cloud is part of flower, and if you send the element cloud back to the sky, there will be no flower. Cloud is a non-flower element. And the sunshine...you can touch the sunshine here. If you send back the element sunshine, the flower will vanish. And sunshine is another non-flower element. And earth, and gardener...if you continue, you will see a multitude of non-flower elements in the flower. In fact, a flower is made only with non-flower elements. It does not have a separate self.

A flower cannot be by herself alone. A flower has to "inter-be" with everything else that is called non-flower. That is what we call inter-being. You cannot be, you can only inter-be. The word inter-be can reveal more of the reality than the word "to be". You cannot be by yourself alone, you have to inter-be with everything else. So the true nature of the flower is the nature of inter-being, the nature of no self. The flower is there, beautiful, fragrant, yes, but the flower is empty of a separate self. To be empty is not a negative note. Nargarjuna, of the second century, said that because of emptiness, everything becomes possible.

So a flower is described as empty. But I like to say it differently. A flower is empty only of a separate self, but a flower is full of everything else. The whole cosmos can be seen, can be identified, can be touched, in one flower. So to say that the flower is empty of a separate self also means that the flower is full of the cosmos. It's the same thing. So you are of the same nature as a flower: you are empty of a separate self, but you are full of the cosmos. You are as wonderful as the cosmos; you are a manifestation of the cosmos. So non-self is another guide that Buddha offers us in order for us to successfully practice looking deeply. What does it mean to look deeply? Looking deeply means to look in such a way that the true nature of impermanence and non-self can reveal themselves to you. Looking into yourself, looking into the flower, you can touch the nature of impermanence and the nature of non-self, and if you can touch the nature of impermanence and non-self deeply, you can also touch the nature of nirvana, which is the Third Dharma Seal.

We have spoken about two dimensions of reality. The first dimension is described as the historical dimension, *dimension historique*, and the other dimension, the ultimate dimension. When we look at a wave, we see that the wave is revealed through many characteristics. The wave seems to have a beginning and the wave seems to have an end. The wave seems to have an "up" and a "down". The wave can be seen as this or that, more beautiful or less beautiful than that, more intelligent, more spiritual or less spiritual than the other waves. And these ideas, such as birth and death, beginning or end, high or low, more or less beautiful, make the life of the wave miserable. If the wave is caught into these notions, the wave does not seem to understand impermanence and non-self. In fact, the wave is made of all the other waves. You can calculate that wave is born from the movement of the water, and looking into the wave, if you make a study of it, you can understand what is going on in the ocean. It is like the nuclear scientists who said that one electron is made of all the other electrons. One electron can be simultaneously here and there, everywhere. That language cannot be easily understood by those of us who do not know anything about nuclear physics.

Those of us who have practiced looking deeply into the nature of no-birth and no-death, who understand the kind of language that the Buddha used, have heard that the wave, while living her life as a wave, can learn to live the life of water at the same time. If she can go back to herself, and touch the water within herself, she will get rid of all these notions: beginning and end, high and low, more or less beautiful. Once she knows that she is water, then all the fear, all the jealousy, all the discrimination will vanish, and she will have peace. We are also like that. Touching our true nature of no-birth and no-death, we will no longer be afraid of anything, whether that is being or non-being, whether that is beginning or ending, coming or going, one or many. Nirvana here means the silencing of all notions, including the notions of coming, going, being, non-being, birth and death. If you have a coin, that can be an example. You see the head, the tail, two aspects of the franc. One is impermanence, one is no self; in fact, these are the same, they belong to the same reality. And there is a third dimension: that is the metal that the piece of money is made of. It is nirvana; it is the base for the other things. So impermanence and non-self are what we experience when we begin to touch the world of birth and death, when we touch the historical dimension. If we know how to touch, we will touch the nature of impermanence, of non-self. And when we touch this nature deeply, we touch nirvana. You don't have to leave the world of the phenomena in order to touch the world of the noumena. You don't have to stop being a wave in order to become water. You can live your historical dimension deeply, with mindfulness, then you can touch very deeply your true nature of being.

There was a student of meditation in Vietnam, who lived in the thirteenth century. One day he heard his master saying that you should make an effort to enter into the realm of no-birth and no-death. And the student asked,

"Respected Teacher, where can I find the realm of no-birth and no-death?" and the teacher said, "You can find it right in the world of birth and death." Where do you tell the wave to go to find water? You find water right in the wave. So nirvana, the nature of no-birth and no-death, is right there in the world of birth and death, if you know how to touch it, because birth and death is only an appearance.

To be born, what does it mean? In our minds, to be born means that from nothing you suddenly become something, from no one, you suddenly become someone; but looking deeply you don't see anything like that. From nothing, how could something become something? A sheet of paper, before it was born as a sheet of paper, was it nothing? Or was it something already. The sheet of paper, before it was born, was the sunshine, the cloud, and the tree. The moment of its birth was only a moment of transformation, of continuation. So that is not exactly the moment of birth. The moment of your birth is only a moment of continuation, because before you were born, you have already been there. From nothing, you can never become something. From no one, you can never become someone. That is why, instead of singing "happy birthday to you", we should sing "happy continuation day to you". Also, at the moment of our so-called death, we can sing the same: happy continuation to you. You continue in other forms. But you don't need this moment to come in order for you to continue.

When I look at myself, I see very clearly that I have begun my continuation a long time ago. If you look at me a little more deeply, you will find out that I am not only here, I am elsewhere, like an electron, which is at the same time here, and there. If you get in touch with my disciples, my students, you recognize my presence in them. If you pick up a book or a tape in a distant city, you know that I am there. So I am not really only here. I am everywhere. I have gone into many directions. It is very difficult for you to identify my presence if you don't practice looking deeply. And it is impossible for me to die. I will continue for a long time. And I am in you. You cannot reduce me into nothingness. My practice, my being, my insight, my suffering, my happiness, have gone very far, so far that I have no means to know. I am now in my own country giving Dharma talks, doing sitting meditation with other people. I am now in a distant prison, because there are prisoners who are practicing sitting meditation and walking meditation using my books. I am in China, I am in Japan, I am in Russia. So it is not easy to identify my presence, if you don't know how to practice looking deeply.

In Zen circles, sometimes they may give you a subject of meditation to ponder: "Tell me, novice, what did your face look like before your grandmother was born?" That is a very nice invitation to go on a journey to find your true self, your true nature, the nature of no-birth and no-death. Nirvana is not something that we don't have, that we have to attain. Just as water is not something that the wave does not already have: the wave has always been water. We have been "nirvanized" a long time ago. We need only to go deep into ourselves to recognize the fact that our ground of being is nirvana. If you come from the Christian tradition, you might like to call it God--Nirvana, the ground of your being, the ground of no-birth and no-death. There is no reason for you to be afraid, and you can enjoy every moment of your daily life that is available to you. The greatest gift that the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara can make to you is the gift of non-fear. The insight into the nature of no-birth and no-death is the ultimate aim of the practice. It would be a pity if you came to a practice center and did not learn anything about that. There are many discourses of the Buddha on this subject. Enjoy your studies and enjoy your practice.

(Three bells)

(End of Dharma talk)

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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## 5 Mindfulness Trainings

### **The First Mindfulness Training**

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to support any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life.

### **The Second Mindfulness Training**

Aware of suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing and oppression, I am committed to cultivating loving kindness and learning ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants and minerals. I will practise generosity by sharing my time, energy and material resources with those who are in real need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others, but I will prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth.

### **The Third Mindfulness Training**

Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families and society. I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment. To preserve the happiness of myself and others, I am determined to respect my commitments and the commitments of others. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct.

### **The Fourth Mindfulness Training**

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am determined to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy and hope. I will not spread news that I do not know to be certain and will not criticise or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I am determined to make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

### **The Fifth Mindfulness Training**

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family and my society by practising mindful eating, drinking and consuming. I will ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being and joy in my body, in my consciousness and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programmes, magazines, books, films and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger and confusion in myself and in society by practising a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society.

# Living Together in Harmony

By Thich Nhat Hanh

Sister Annabel's summary of Thay's translation for the children:

Two young people, one representing America, one representing Europe, were talking about the happiness in their daily lives, the difficulties they meet every day, and the things they want to have happen. The girl who represents North America said that when she hears the birds sing in the morning, it brings her happiness. When she meets her friends, her dear ones, she feels happy. When she's in touch with what is wonderful in the present moment, she is happy. Her difficulty is that she is pulled back into the past. The suffering she has had in the past seems to imprison her, and stop her going deeply into the happiness of the present moment. Another difficulty she has is that everything is impermanent, but she wants nothing to change, from her body to her soul, her mind, the things around her, she wants them to stay exactly as they are, but the truth is that everything is impermanent and changing.

The girl who represents Europe said that when she came here she had a lot of happiness, but that she had one very big difficulty: that her father and mother were always fighting. And every time that would happen she suffered a great deal. She really wants to tell her father and mother that she loves them very much, and say to them: "Don't make me suffer anymore." That is her deepest desire. The girl from the United States also said that one of her deep desires is to be able to tell her father that she loves him.

The girl from Europe said that when she came here she wanted to be able to practice so as to be strong enough to tell her parents that they shouldn't fight anymore. It seems so easy.

If we come here and we practice we will be able to do that—we will be able to tell our parents what we need to tell them. So, please smile and breathe, listening to the bell: "Breathing in. I know I am at Plum Village with all my friends; breathing out, I smile to Plum Village and all my friends."

(Three bells)

Dear Sangha, today is the nineteenth of July, 1998. We are in the Lower Hamlet, and the Dharma talk will be in Vietnamese. Somebody asked, "Can you tell me what is an ideal father?" Somebody else replied, "An ideal father is someone who knows how to love Mother and how to make Mother happy." It seems to be a very simple answer, but it's also very deep. What does a child need most of all? Does he need money to buy presents;

does she need money to buy toys? What does a child need most of all? What a child needs most of all is the love of the father.

There are many children who have so many toys and so much pocket money, but they're not happy because their father is always making their mother suffer, and often the children are very sad. They want to run away, because the atmosphere in the family is so heavy, like the atmosphere before a heavy storm. The atmosphere is a suffering atmosphere, in the house and in the family, and Father brings about this atmosphere when he makes Mother suffer. So the child wants to run away, but where can he or she run? In former times we may have had a house and a nice garden, with a little pond, with plenty of room, and the child could run out into the garden and sit by the pond, or run to a neighbor, meet an aunt or an uncle in the village...but now, we may be living in a high apartment block, and the child in this environment has no where to run to--there's only one place, and that is the toilet or bathroom, to close the door and run away there. This suffocating, heavy atmosphere destroys and withers the child, so the child wants to run away, and the child doesn't know where to go, so she goes into the toilet and cries on her own. But even in the toilet she doesn't feel safe, because she can still hear the voices of Mother crying or Father talking.

The children who live right in the middle of such an atmosphere cannot grow up in a fresh and beautiful way; it is just like the tree in the garden when there is no sunshine or no rain or no gardener to look after it. When such a tree grows up, it also has to have a family: it has to have a wife, a husband and children. But it doesn't know how to make the family happy, because the child has not learned that from Father. The child doesn't know how to love Mother, how to look after Mother. The father did not know how to look after Mother, and because the child has never seen Father look after Mother, he hasn't been able to learn how to love. When that child marries he or she repeats the mistakes of Father or Mother, and these mistakes bring about suffering again for the dear ones. This is what we call *Samsara*; it means the cycle of rebirth, which never comes to an end, and from one generation to the next, this suffering continues to be handed down. Only when we are able to be in touch with the real teachings and learn ways of practice are we able to break into this cycle of suffering called *Samsara*.

When children come to Plum Village, they can learn ways to break this cycle, so that they can open up a new area in which the father will have the capacity, the art of bringing happiness, care and love to his wife. Many young people say that the most precious gift, which parents can give to their children, is the happiness of the parents. The children don't need a lot: all they need is for their parents to be happy together, and that is enough for the children to be happy. So if we are a mother or a father, we must know that the thing our child needs most is our happiness, and our happiness with our spouse. That is the greatest gift we can give our children. And if our parents want to make each other happy, they should know how to practice the Fourth Mindfulness Training, at the very least. The Fourth Mindfulness Training is the capacity to listen deeply, and to speak gently and lovingly. Deep listening, loving speech, this is all parents need to learn, and they will be able to establish communication, and not make each other suffer. Then they will offer to their children a great deal of happiness.

Listening deeply is something we have to learn to do—we can't do it just like that. When the other person is talking he or she is trying to express his or her difficulties and

sufferings, and needs us to listen to that. But if we are not capable of listening, then the person who is speaking will not feel any relief in his or her suffering, and will finally give up talking. So when we love someone, our wife, our husband, our children, our father, we need to practice listening deeply to that person. Maybe our father does not know how to listen to our mother, or our mother does not know how to listen deeply to our father, but what of us? Do we know how to listen deeply to our mother and father? Sometimes we say, "My mother doesn't listen to my father, my father doesn't listen to my mother." But we ourselves do not listen deeply to our mother or father either. Therefore, mother, father and child, when they go to the temple, when they go to the meditation center, must practice listening deeply, because listening deeply is the practice of Bodhisattva *Avalokiteshvara*. This morning the monks and nuns have sung the praises of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, who has a very skilful way of listening deeply. That is why she is called *Quan The Am*: it means, "observing the sounds that come from the world."

People who have suffering, who have feelings hidden deep in their hearts, which they have not been able to express, they need an opportunity to express this suffering, and if no one sits to listen to them, how can they have that opportunity to express these hidden feelings of suffering? Therefore we need to practice looking deeply into that person, and that is the way to show that we love them. If we are a father and we want to listen to our children, we can sit alongside our child in silence, and then we say: "My dear child, please tell me, do you have any difficulties? Do you have any suffering? Please tell me. I want to listen so I can see if I can help you at all." So the father says this with his heart. And if we are a wife, and we know our husband has sufferings and difficulties which he has not been able to talk about, we go to our husband, and sit silently, very freshly, alongside him, and then we say: "My dear husband, do you have any suffering? Do you have any difficulties hidden in your heart? Please let me know about them." The wife must say that.

If we are a husband or a father and we have suffering—and we all have suffering; some of us have a great deal, some of us have a little—when the other person says that to us, we see we have an opportunity to say what we want to. At first it's difficult for us to say it. No one has tried to listen to us before, and now when somebody invites us to speak like that, we're not sure if we really believe it. But the wife, or whoever asks the question, should be patient and say, "Please, please tell me. It may be because of my unskillfulness, my foolishness, that you suffer, and I want to hear this. Please tell me if I do anything foolish or clumsy which makes you suffer. I promise that I will sit by you very calmly and silently and listen, because I am practicing as a student of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. I will not judge, I will not react, I will not be angry. My teacher and my Sangha have told me how to practice being peaceful and calm, how to eat peacefully, how to walk peacefully, how to sit peacefully, and now I am able to sit and listen. I'm not like I used to be." We can try to persuade our husbands like that, so he can say his difficulties for us to hear.

If we are children, we shouldn't think that only we suffer, as children. Father suffers. Father has difficulties. Therefore we can practice, and we can say, "Daddy, I know you are my father, but I know you have difficulties. Sometimes you are angry with me, sometimes you are upset with me, sometimes I don't do what you like, but that is because I don't know your heart, I don't know your difficulties. And now I want to hear you; I want to hear the things that you don't like about me, that you think I can improve. And I

will listen to you, I will listen with the heart of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, because I have been to the meditation center, I have met the monks and nuns, I have met the Sangha and I have learned how to sit and listen deeply. So please, Father, tell me, and I will be like Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. I will sit and listen very attentively. I will listen with all my ears, not half my ears, and I will listen with my heart, because Avalokiteshvara is one who can listen with both the ears and with the heart, and can listen for an hour like that." When the child listens to the father for an hour like that, the father will feel much better.

We all have to practice in the family: mother, father, and child. We can't just listen deeply because we want to do it, we have to practice first, because if we stop listening halfway through, the other person will feel: "What a waste of time!" If we are listening and people say things that are completely wrong—they have misunderstood us completely—when they describe these things, we feel their lack of loyalty towards us, we feel their misunderstanding, we hear them condemning and criticizing us, and as we listen to them, it may water all the seeds of our suffering. We can shout back at them or we can run out, but if we do either, we have not succeeded in our practice of listening deeply.

Have Father and Mother been successful yet in practicing listening deeply? If Mother and Father have not yet been successful, we as children have to help them. We have to listen to Father and Mother. We have to prove that we as children are able to listen deeply. We are able to understand our father, we are able to listen to our mother and understand our mother. And we can go to our mother and say, "Mother, you know I went to Father, I listened deeply, and now I understand Father, and I see Father suffers much less. Please, Mother, do the same thing. I'm going to help you to be able to sit and listen deeply to Father."

If you are only a child, you may only be small, you may not have great wisdom, but you have been in touch with Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, with the monks and the nuns, and you can also help your father. "Father, have you practiced listening to Mother yet? My mother has so many difficulties and sadness in her heart, many things you don't know about. So please, father, listen to mother deeply. I've practiced listening to mother deeply, and I know you can do it. I will support you. Father, please listen to mother deeply, please do so in silence, and when mother says something that's not true, don't get angry; just breathe and listen deeply so she suffers less. Don't listen deeply in order to blame, in order to criticize. And if you can't do it yet, Father, please go to the meditation center and learn walking meditation, learn sitting meditation, learn how to walk in mindfulness and to eat in mindfulness, and then after a matter of days you will be able to practice listening deeply."

Listening deeply is the most wonderful practice of Buddha and Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, and when we say the name of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, it means that we accept Avalokiteshvara as our teacher. Avalokiteshvara has the capacity to listen deeply. Therefore, if we are a student of Avalokiteshvara, we have to practice listening deeply too. Today, you very little children have heard this; remember the words I have just taught you. When Father and Mother are not happy together, you have to join your palms and say to them, "Mother, Father, where is my present? My present is your happiness. If you don't give me that present I'm going to suffer a lot." That is a bell of

mindfulness to wake up Mother and Father, and then Mother and Father will try to practice.

When you little children hear the sound of the bell, please stand up, and bow, and you can go out. But the older children please stay behind—only the very tiny ones go out now.

(Bell)

Today, what I've tried to tell you children is that you learn to say to your parents, "Dear Mommy and Daddy, the greatest gift you can give me is your happiness. Please give me that present."

(Bell)

Today, we have begun to learn about a method of deep listening. As we already know, we have to practice before we can listen deeply. Sometimes we can also translate "deep listening" as compassionate listening, that is, to listen with compassion, or to listen with love. We hear with one aim only; we don't listen in order to criticize, to blame, to correct the person who is speaking or to condemn the person. We only listen with one aim, and that is to relieve the suffering of the one we are listening to. We have to sit still, we have to sit with inner freedom, and we have to be one hundred percent present, body and mind, listening so the other can relieve his or her suffering. If the other person says things which are not right, which are wrong perceptions, we may have a wish to respond, to say, "That's wrong!" and to argue with them. But we mustn't do that—we have to sit and listen. If we can sit for an hour, that is a golden hour. That hour is an hour, which can heal and transform.

We can do much better than psychotherapists, because there are psychotherapists who haven't learned how to listen deeply, who haven't learned how to listen compassionately. Psychotherapists have their own suffering, maybe a great deal of suffering, so that their capacity to listen deeply may not be very great. We don't know much about the theories of psychotherapy, but we have practiced stopping and looking deeply, we have already practiced listening deeply, and therefore we can do better than psychotherapists. We use the method of listening deeply, first of all for our loved ones and our family, and once we are successful with our family we can help our friends. We can listen deeply so that the world suffers less; that is our practice. Of course, psychotherapists have to learn how to listen deeply according to the practice in order to be really good psychotherapists.

When we can listen deeply, when we know how to do it, when we know how to speak lovingly as well, that has the function of reviving the communication between two people. Actually, when we know how to listen deeply, we will already speak lovingly. (Next time I talk, we will learn about using loving speech, and that belongs to the Fourth Mindfulness Training. We will learn more about these things in our Dharma discussions.) In our own time, the technology of communication is very great. We have all kinds of communication, like e-mail, fax and telephone, and therefore we can be in touch with each other very quickly, and in a couple hours the news can be taken from one end of the world to the other. But, there is obstruction in the communication between people in the family, between father and son, between wife and husband. Therefore, it is very important for us to learn how to listen deeply.



The children have spoken the truth: the reason that father and mother make each other suffer is that they don't understand each other, they don't know how to listen to each other deeply. They don't have the capacity to use loving speech. Father and mother do not know that while they are making each other suffer, they are also making their children suffer. And who are their children? Their children are their continuation. To say it in another way, our children are ourselves. And when we make ourselves suffer, when we make our husband or wife suffer, we are also making our children suffer. Our children will also make our grandchildren suffer, because we don't have the capacity to show to our children the art of making happiness, or the art of making our spouses happy. And how can our children learn that, if they can't learn it from us? If they don't learn it, they will grow up and make the same mistakes we have made, and this cycle of Samsara will carry on in our children; and our suffering will be handed on to our children, and our children's suffering will be handed on to our grandchildren, and this cycle of Samsara will never come to an end. We have to put an end to this cycle by the method of listening deeply and using loving speech. Using loving speech and listening deeply will establish communication, and when there is communication and understanding between us, then happiness will be there.

Maybe in former times Mother and Father could smile to each other: in that moment when they first knew each other, when they first fell in love, and they did not know that this person was going to live with them for the rest of their lives. So when a couple makes a decision, in a superficial way, to live together for their whole lives, and these two bodies have come to live together, but their souls are not in harmony, there is not communication, there is not understanding, there is not sharing of the deep things of their souls, then there is no communication. If we are young, we know that in former times our father was a young person, our mother was young too, and in those moments when they first came together and when they had not yet shared the deepest things of their hearts, then they made a mistake. That started their suffering for the rest of their lives. And we see that as children we are continuing with that suffering, and if we are not skilful, if we are not clever, we will repeat the mistakes our mothers and fathers made, especially when we are attached, and we fall in love, and we make a commitment to stay with the other person. We don't want to do as our mother and father have done, but in the end we will do as our mother and father did, and we will make our partner suffer, and we will give birth to children who will suffer too, and that is called Samsara.

A person is made out of body and mind. If there is only communication between the bodies but not between the souls, that is something very dangerous. When we love each other, we want to be close to each other, but is this closeness a closeness of souls, where there is communication, where there is understanding, where we can share spiritual values together? Then the coming together of the two bodies will have meaning and will bring happiness. But if two bodies come together without a coming together of the souls, then there will be suffering, and we will not be able to tell our children what real love is. Then we can call the coming together of the two bodies "empty sex."

When children of twelve or thirteen years old, or thirteen or fourteen years old, come together, and sleep together, what will happen? There is the coming together of the two bodies, pushed along by sexual desire, and then the two children don't understand each other, don't know anything about each other, they don't know what love is. That is the

thing that we call empty sex, and it is very dangerous, because then those two young people will go deep into the path of sexual desire, where there's nothing else but sex, no understanding. This is taught very clearly in the Asian tradition, and I think this existed in former times in the Western tradition as well.

In the Asian tradition, our bodies are also sacred, like our souls, and we cannot share our bodies with just anybody. In our bodies there are areas, which are very sacred, like the top of our head, for example. Usually a father and mother in Vietnam, when their child is standing in front of them at the age of three or four years old, will ask their child: "My child, do you love your parents?" and the child says, "I love Mommy, I love Daddy." And the parents ask, "Where do you put your love for your parents?" and the child says "I put my love for my parents on my head." The top of the head, as far as the Asian person is concerned, especially a Vietnamese person, is the altar; and on that altar we put the most sacred thing. For example, if we go into a house in Vietnam, we may see that that house is very poor, but there is always an ancestral altar. That ancestral altar is very sacred. We put maybe just one plate of fruit or a vase of flowers, or some incense on that table. We don't go to the market and then put down the shopping bag on the ancestral altar when we come home. That is a great irreverence, and nobody would ever do that.

As far as our body is concerned, the altar of our body is the top of our head, and we worship the Buddha, we worship the ancestors on the top of our head. And as far as a Vietnamese person is concerned, if somebody else puts his or her hand on our head, that is very irreverent. There are Westerners who don't understand that and they may put their hand on our head, but we feel like saying to them, "Please, put your hand on my shoulder, but not on my head. Otherwise I will feel very offended, I feel that's very offensive."

If the monks and nuns in Plum Village are holding something precious, related the Dharma, such as their Sutra or their Sanghati robe, and somebody comes to say hello to them or to give them a letter, they have to put their Sanghati robe on their head, on the altar of their body. That is the worthiest place to put their robe. They could not put it on the earth. You cannot put the *Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*, or the *Amitabha Sutra* on the earth. We feel respect for the Sutra, the Sutra is a Dharma jewel, and we have to put it in a very clean place. It is the same with our Sanghati robe; our Sanghati robe was given to us by the Buddha, by our teacher, so we can make ceremonies. We cannot put it on the earth. If there's no table nearby, we have to put it on top of our heads, and when we receive the letter we put it in our pocket, and then we take the robe off our head and hold it in our hands.

Apart from the top of our heads, there are other sacred parts of our body. There are other parts of our body that we don't want anyone to see, that we don't want anyone to touch. This is true of a girl, and it is true of a boy. Our body is sacred, like our soul. In our soul, there are sacred areas we don't want anyone to see or to touch. There are experiences; there are images, which we want to keep hidden just for ourselves. We don't want to share them with anybody--only when that person is someone in whom we have the most confidence in the world, whom we love most in the world, then we will take those things from the depths of our hearts and we will show them to them. But the number of people in this world with whom we can share these things are very few, probably only one. There are areas in our soul that are forbidden areas, like in the imperial city, where there are the forbidden places you can't enter. If you go in you will be arrested, and you will

have your head cut off. Our soul is the same, and our body is the same. There are secret areas that are very sacred, and we can't allow just anyone to come in. We can hold someone's hand, we can put our hand on somebody's shoulder, but if we touch these sacred areas, these secret areas of our bodies, that is something we should not do, and that includes the top of our heads.

Only when we have a friend who really understands us, who really loves us, who will die with us, can we share those deeply hidden areas of our bodies and our souls. And then the coming together of two bodies is like a very sacred ceremony. This coming together of the two bodies is at the same time the coming together of two souls, and it will bring about happiness. In former times this was very clear as far as Eastern people were concerned, and I am confident that in the Western tradition that exists also, but it has been lost for many of us; we look down on our bodies, we look down on our souls, and we do not see their sacredness. And we do not look after our bodies and souls at the time of coming together with another body. When these children of thirteen and fourteen have sex together, it is something very dangerous. They do not know what love is, they do not know what the body is, they do not know what the soul is. And if they do that, in the future they won't have the opportunity to know what real love is, what real communication is. This is a fruit that is not yet ripe; this is a flower, which has not yet opened. Therefore, we have to protect our young people.

If we are young people, we have to protect our own bodies, and we have to know the Third Mindfulness Training, on knowing how to practice chastity. If we have sex without protecting the integrity of our body and our mind, or of the body and mind of the person we love, we are offending against the Third Mindfulness Training. And if two bodies have sex when there is not yet the meeting of the two souls, when there is not yet understanding, it is very dangerous. We have to avoid it, we have to stop it, we shouldn't allow it to happen. Otherwise we are going against the teachings of the Third Mindfulness Training.

In the 1930's and 1940's there was a young poet who wrote just about love poetry, and one day he wrote a poem that said:

You're Still Very Far Away

One day you were sitting far from me.  
I asked you to come and sit near to me.  
You came a little nearer, and I was upset.  
You came a little nearer all the time.  
I was about to get angry.  
You quickly stood up  
And came and sat near me.  
There you were. I was happy.  
But soon I became sad again,  
Because I saw that we were still very far from each other:  
Sitting very near, still very far.  
Why far? We were sitting next to each other,  
Our bodies were right next to each other.  
Why were we far?

Because there was still not communication between our souls.

The two universes were still far apart.

These two young people, though they sleep together, are still far apart. They cannot take away the wall, which is dividing them. When we sleep with a person, we may feel that because we are near them, there is communication; but that is an illusion. The coming together of two bodies can bring about greater separation than there was before. Many people have witnessed that if there is not understanding, communication, real love, deep sharing in our ideals and our life, and we put our two bodies together and have sex together, then not only will there be no communication at that time, but a huge rift can be dug between us, and that is very dangerous.

When the poet wrote this poem he did not want to say what I have said here, but he said it in poetry: "I was angry because you were not near enough to me, but when you came and sat very near to me, I thought I was satisfied. But that satisfaction existed only for a few moments, and then I was sad because I saw that we were not close at all. But there's no way for us to get closer. The only way we could have gotten closer was by deep understanding, by being able to share with each other our suffering, our ideals, our difficulties." Therefore, to practice communication by listening deeply, and by speaking lovingly is so important.

(Bell)

In Buddhism there is an expression, a very sweet expression: *kalyanamitra*, which means a friend in the practice, a spiritual friend. This is a friend who helps us to go forward on our spiritual path. We are happy when we have a friend who can support us, who can protect us, who can help us to go forward on the path of understanding and love, the path of making others happy. If we have a spiritual friend like that, we have to do all we can to keep that friend, because if we lose that friend, we can lose everything. This is the most necessary companion in life. He has stopped us going through the paths of darkness; he has held us so we can go on the path of our ideal. That is the spiritual friend, the *kalyanamitra*. *Mitra* means friend. *Kalyana* means good. If the person we love is a *kalyanamitra*, then we are fortunate, because in that person there is the essence called inner freedom, or happiness. If we can go on our spiritual path, our life's path, with such a person, then we are someone with happiness. Maybe we have a spiritual friend like that, but maybe we have not been able to recognize that we have a spiritual friend. We could lose that person easily if we don't recognize that they are a spiritual friend. Maybe near us there is someone like that, ready to be our friend on the path, ready to support us, to protect us, to help us; but because we do not dwell in the present moment, we do not have clear vision, we cannot see that that person is present. And if we return to the present moment and look around, we may discover, "I have a *kalyanamitra*, a precious spiritual friend." When we have been able to recognize our *kalyanamitra*, we will have a great deal of happiness, and we will make a deep vow that we will never say or do anything to lose this person from our life.

When I was young, when I was a novice, I read that our father and mother gave us physical birth, but the person who helps us to realize our ideal is our spiritual friend. Although our parents gave us birth, they may not be able to help us realize our spiritual

ideal. But our friend, our kalyanamitra, is the person who will help us to realize our path. And this is also true of teacher and disciple. Our teacher has given birth to our spiritual life, but maybe our teacher can't help us to grow up on the spiritual path, maybe we have to have spiritual friends, and only then can we grow up on the spiritual path. When I was sixteen years old I really learned these words; "Mother and Father give us physical life, and our spiritual friend is the one who helps us realize the path." I have never forgotten these words, and I realize that if I were to lose my spiritual friend, I could lose my spiritual life. Therefore we have to be so careful.

In the *Avatamsaka Sutra* it says that the kalyanamitra is the person who is able to help us to keep our *bodhicitta*, that is our mind of awakening, our mind of love. Our *bodhicitta* is a very great energy in our life of practice, and our following the path of practice. The *bodhicitta*, the mind of love, is the energy, which wants us to go towards transformation of suffering, not only in ourselves, but in all those around us. And when we have this mind of love, we are strong, and when our *bodhicitta* is solid and firm, then our path ahead is very straight. We have energy and we have solidity. But if this *bodhicitta* is weakened or fades, then our happiness will fade also, and we will not be able to offer happiness to those around us, to those we love, and others too. Therefore, keeping the *bodhicitta*, in order to be able to continue on the path of our deepest ideal, is something very important, and the person who can help us to keep this *bodhicitta* solidly is our kalyanamitra. Therefore our spiritual friend is the one who is able to help us to dwell with and in our *bodhicitta*, so that our *bodhicitta*, our mind of life, never falls from our heart.

In our life we need to find a spiritual friend. If we do not yet have that person, we should look for them. We may have a teacher, but a teacher is not enough. We need a friend, and that friend, that kalyanamitra, is our place of refuge. We may find that friend in a Sangha: someone we trust, someone whom, when we sit next to them we feel solid, we feel free, we feel solid in our path of practice. We must call this person our kalyanamitra. Thank you, my spiritual friend, for being present in my life. A kalyanamitra, according to the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, is someone who helps us grow up in our capacity to practice solidly, to practice diligently. This person induces us to develop our wholesome roots, because we all have wholesome roots, we all have the seeds of love, of forgiveness, of joy, of wisdom and of happiness. These seeds are present in the souls of all of us, but our kalyanamitra is the person who has the capacity every day to water those seeds, to help those seeds grow up. If we do not have a kalyanamitra, the good seeds in our soul, in our hearts, will not continue to develop. Therefore I need my kalyanamitra just as a tree needs the light of the sun everyday.

If we are still young, we should know that we need a spiritual friend. Many friends will draw us into dark parts, which will destroy our body and our mind, and we will not have the energy and the joy of life. We should recognize that these friends are not people that we should be close to; people like this we cannot call kalyanamitra. Instead of spiritual friends, we have to call them "evil friends." We need to stay away from anyone we recognize as evil friend, an unwholesome friend, somebody who draws us into wine bars, into places where drugs are used, where there are addicts, people who speak roughly, people who don't know how to listen deeply, people whose words are as violent as their actions. If we live with them, if we keep going back to them, our bodies and our minds will be destroyed by them, we will make ourselves suffer, and we will make our parents suffer. So we have to recognize who are the unwholesome friends, who are the good

spiritual friends, and when we have found the good spiritual friends, we have to be determined not lose them. Father and Mother gave us our physical birth, but those who help us grow upon the path of practice are our spiritual friends.

Our spiritual friend is someone who knows how to live in mindfulness, who knows how to live according to the principles of the five mindfulness Trainings. Living according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings is living under the protection of the Three Energies. These Three Energies protect us and direct us, look after us, and these Three Energies are Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. These three energies are not ideas, or something outside of us. These three energies are things we can be in touch with when we are mindful.

What is Buddha? Buddha is awakening, Buddha is the energy of awakening, Buddha is mindfulness. Whenever we return and dwell peacefully in the present moment, whenever our bodies and minds come back and are one, whenever we know how to breathe mindfully, walk mindfully, eat mindfully, recognize the presence of our loved ones, Buddha is present, and that energy is called the energy of awakening, of mindfulness. When we have that energy in us, we know we have Buddha in our hearts, and Buddha is protecting us. Buddha is not some symbol. Buddha is not a god. Buddha is not one person. In the past there have been many Buddhas, in the present there are many Buddhas, and in the future there will be many Buddhas. Buddha is anyone who has the energy of awakening, the energy of love, of understanding and mindfulness. That is what we call Buddha, and all of us have the seeds of mindfulness, of love, of understanding, of forgiveness in us, and when we return to ourselves and recognize those seeds in us and we help those seeds to grow, then we are in touch with Buddha in our own persons. There is no one who does not have the seeds of Buddha; there is no one who does not have the capacity to be in touch with Buddha in their own person. Therefore to practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings is a wonderful method, very concrete, for mindfulness always to be there in our daily lives. And mindfulness is Buddha. And this Buddha is not the past; Buddha is the present.

And what is Dharma? Dharma is the practice of mindfulness, all the different ways of practicing mindfulness. We could say that Dharma is the Dharma talk, Dharma is the Sutra, but a Dharma talk or a sutra is not the living Dharma. Living Dharma is when we know how to walk mindfully, when we know how to sit mindfully, when we know how to eat mindfully, we know how to breathe mindfully, we know how to recognize what is happening in the present moment. These practices are living Dharma. If we practice mindfulness in our daily life, then we are making Dharma shine all around us. When people look at us they will see us as the living Dharma. Living Dharma is not made by images and sounds it is made by life. Therefore, someone who knows how to practice mindfulness when walking, sitting, washing clothes, making tea, looking after and loving, that person is a manifestation of living Dharma. Though that person does not give Dharma talks, such a person is giving a Dharma talk with his body with her life... teaching by their lives, and not just by Dharma talk. When we live like that we are protected by the second energy, called the energy of the true teachings.

The third energy is Sangha. Sangha is the community. In the community you have teachers, monks, nuns, and lay people. It is called the four-fold Sangha, and they are there to look after a practice center, so that the people practicing there are solid, and it is the safest place for us to come to. We can be protected there, because everyone there is

practicing mindfulness, breathing mindfully, eating mindfully, working mindfully; therefore the energy of the Sangha will look after us and protect us.

And we practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings: the First, the Second, the Third, the Fourth and the Fifth. We talked a little bit before of the Third Mindfulness Training, how to protect our bodies, our integrity and our chastity, and that of others as well. We also talked a little bit about the Fourth Mindfulness Training, how to listen deeply and practice loving speech. When we practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we are practicing very concretely the method of mindfulness. Practicing mindfulness is to have the protection of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. When we practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings solidly, we will have a "precepts body," called *silakaya*, and this precepts body will protect us in our daily lives. When this precepts body is whole, that is because of our practice of the Mindfulness Trainings and of the Mindful Manners in a very wholesome way--we are protected by the three energies of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. When we offend against the Mindfulness Trainings and we offend against the Mindful Manners, our precepts body is cracked, and then we are not protected anymore. We fall into situations of danger, misfortune, because our precepts body has been broken, it is no longer whole. Wherever we go, fear goes with us. If, for instance, we are dying, we have an accident, we are wounded, we will feel that there is nothing to protect us. When people have been through accidents and dangers, they need the protection of their precepts body. Without it, they will be very afraid, and that fear will take away all their peace; when fear is there, we cannot overcome the accident, the death, the sickness, and the loss of our lives. If we don't want this to happen, the best thing we can do is to protect ourselves with the energy of mindfulness, to keep our precepts body whole, unbroken.

(Bell)

If you want to succeed in your practice, if you want to arrive at transformation and healing, you should rely on the Mindfulness Trainings, and you should rely on your spiritual friend. Your spiritual friend is someone who keeps the Mindfulness Trainings. That person is solid, has inner freedom, and is fearless. If we are near to someone like that, we will enjoy the freedom, the fearlessness and the solidity of that person. If in our lives we have these two things, the Mindfulness Trainings and our spiritual friend, then our lives will be successful. We should never allow these two things to fall from our hands—actually these two things are one. When we do not have a spiritual friend, we should look and find a spiritual friend. When we do not have Mindfulness Trainings, we should look and find Mindfulness Trainings.

In our relationships with our loved ones, our father, our mother, or our children, if there are difficulties, sufferings, we should rely on our Mindfulness Trainings and our spiritual friend to re-establish the communication, so that we will easily use loving speech and deep listening in order to bring about happiness for our family, and to open a path to a wholesome future. When we learn how to listen deeply and use loving speech, we can begin to re-establish communication between ourselves and our mother or our father, or with our husband, or our wife. If we cannot yet speak directly to them, we can write a letter to them, because writing a letter is a way of communicating, and it can be a very deep art. We write down what we want to say in a letter...maybe we can't say these things to him, we feel unnatural saying them, but we sit in our room, we take a piece of paper and a pen, and we say, "Dear father, do you know I love you? I understand you are suffering, I understand your difficulties, and I want to tell you that I love you, I

understand you, and I want you to be happy." We can write it on a piece of paper, and when father reads it, he will feel released in his heart. A seed of suffering has been recognized by someone and there is someone who can understand him. And that person could be his own child—why should our spiritual friend not be our child?

I have organized retreats in Europe and the United States for young children, and when they have practice for seven or five days, they go home and make peace with their father and mother, and they bring their father and mother to the practice center. Even a child of twelve or thirteen years can play the role of kalyanamitra for their father and mother, and many children have been successful. This gives me much faith and happiness. If my child is going on the dark path, a dangerous path, and I am father or mother and I am worried about my child, and I cannot communicate with that child, the method is still the method of deep listening, speaking lovingly, and keeping the Mindfulness Trainings. We can practice, we can talk with all our love, and we can say, "My dear child, I know you have difficulties, I know you suffer and you have not been able to talk about it. Before I did not have the capacity to listen to you, but now I have begun a practice and I can listen to you. So please tell me, have I made some mistakes which have made you suffer?" If the child can say what it is, the child will suffer much less. And if you feel shy, if you cannot yet say this to your child, you can write a letter to them.

We have lost our children. We cannot communicate with them anymore; we cannot share with them the beautiful and the good things. That is a great failure. We have received so many precious jewels from the culture and from the teachings of the Buddha, but because of our difficulties in communication with our children, we have not been able to hand on to them the precious and valuable things of our culture. So if we want to hand on these precious things, we need to have communication. There is only one way to re-establish communication, and that is by listening deeply and speaking lovingly. We have a pen, we have a piece of paper, so why do we not write a letter to be able to open the door of communication which for so long has been tightly closed. Our child is going on this dangerous and dark path. We have to become the kalyanamitra for our child. Why not? We are the father, we are the mother. We have to help our child. We have to be the kalyanamitra of our child. We have to practice loving speech and deep listening in order to open the door of communication again.

When we have been able to persuade our child, then there is a future. Because what is our future if it is not our child? If we lose our child, we do not have a future. Our child will continue us in the future, and will take us into the future. If we lose our child, how can we have that continuation, how can we continue in the future? Therefore, we have to practice in order to be able re-establish the communication, so that we can hand on the culture of our ancestors to our children. If all the children are cut off from their parents because of anger, then the whole cultural tradition will be cut, and all the valuable things which our ancestors left to us will not be handed on. If we can hand on these things, that is a wonderful gift for our society. In our society there are so many hungry ghosts, so many young people wandering around hungry, without any faith in their culture, in their family, in their parents, no faith in the school or university, no faith in the values that we accept. They have no place of refuge, they are like hungry ghosts, without love, without understanding. In our daily life we have thought about so many hungry ghosts, young people today. Among the youth of today, there are so many wandering spirits, who have no faith in anything in their culture. Therefore the duty of parents and grandparents is to



become the kalyanamitra of their children and grandchildren. That is the greatest gift of love that we can give to our children. That is the way we can be bodhisattvas: we are our children's fathers, but we are also our children's friends. We want to be able to revive the communication between father and child. If we can do that, we are disciples of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara.

(Bell)

(End of talk)

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# Overcoming the Fear of Death

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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My dear friends,

Today is the twenty-eighth of July 1997 and we are in the Upper Hamlet. I remember in the old time, about ten years ago, there was a little boy who came to Plum Village to practice. He spent one day in Plum Village and then two days in Plum Village and then he liked it. There were a lot of children practicing and playing with him. So during a tea meditation, rather lemonade meditation, he said "Everything is wonderful here except one thing—there is no television." But he survived. Survived and then he continued and stayed several weeks in Plum Village. One of his conclusions before leaving Plum Village: that it is possible to survive without television. You can have many kinds of joy and you can nourish yourself with these joys. You don't need television. I am not against television. There are many wonderful programs. I only call for attention because there are many programs of television that are not very healthy to us. They bring us so many toxins.

There was another boy who arrived in Plum Village and he found it too quiet. Many hundred people staying here and yet too quiet and he wanted to leave right away. I think his parents had negotiated with him that if he would stay in Plum Village for one week, then they would bring him to the seashore for two weeks. He thought that was a good deal—one week in Plum Village and then two weeks at the beach. But when he arrived in Plum Village, he found it so calm that he didn't like it at all. He hated it and he wanted to go right away. He was very strong, very determined and his parents were in despair because his parents loved Plum Village and they wanted very much to practice in Plum Village. So they were about to give up and leave Plum Village with their child. Suddenly Sister Chang Khong appeared and she said, "Okay, you can leave, but stay just for one hour." Then she brought a few children to come and play with him and he liked it and he accepts to stay for one day. He was a special person to be taken care of, so other children were asked to take care of him. He got the attention of other young people and he liked it. He found that the children here are very nice—kind to him. So he accepted to stay for another day and then he extended it to several days. The young man liked it and he agreed to stay for one whole week.

At the end of the week, he proposed to his parents to stay on. He didn't want to go to the beach anymore. He wanted to stay in Plum Village for two more weeks.

I think it is possible to be happy without watching television a lot. Again, I want to say that I am not against television, because we can profit a lot from television. But we should have an intelligent policy. I think that the family should get together and discuss how to use the television. Everyone has to be present and we should agree on what kind of programs we should view and what kind of programs we should not view. I think we should have a TV magazine to find out what we can see and what we should not see.

I know a family in Boston. They selected the programs of television very carefully. If they see in the program a very good film, they agree that everyone should be present to view the film together. Grandma, Daddy, Mommy, everyone wears their best dress and goes to the living room and sit very comfortably and watches television, like going to the cinema, it's like a ritual. Imagine, Grandma puts on her best dress and wants all her grandchildren to come and sit close to her. She is very happy. Watching that film alone would not make her as happy as watching together with the whole family.

In our modern times, the family does not have a lot of chance to be together. Sometimes people eat at different times. That is a pity. We should arrange so that we eat together as a family at least once a day. Is that too much—once a day? We should practice walking meditation, together the whole family, at least once a week. If you live near the beach or the bank of the river, or a woods, it would be wonderful if the whole family could organize a walking meditation together for thirty or forty-five minutes. That is my wish. We can bring some of the things that we practice at Plum Village home, like together doing a session of total relaxation in the living room. Everyone has to learn how to conduct such a session. Even if you are still very young, you can conduct a session of total relaxation. As you know, for sitting meditation, you don't have to sit a lot. You sit for a number of breaths only breathing in, breathing out. You may like to use pebble meditations. Adults can also practice pebble meditations with their children. So I rely, I trust, that you use your intelligence to organize the practice at home. We count on you very much.

When I was in Italy a few months ago, I gave a retreat where there were many children. There was a little girl who had a little sister and hated her. One day she told her parents, "Why don't we kill her?" She meant her younger sister. Because people are inclined to eliminate the things they don't like. We live in a technological world. There are many quick ways to eliminate what we don't

want. A sister wants to kill her younger sister because she does not get along with her, she was so demanding. It upsets me a lot when I hear the story.

I think in television you watch programs like Power Rangers. In that series, Power Rangers, you have the power to destroy everything that you don't like, and of course there are many things that we don't like around us. There was a little girl who pointed a toy gun at her mother and said, "I want to shoot you down." When we have something wrong within our body, we have the tendency to open our body, cut it, and throw it out. We call it surgery. We want to do it quickly. We don't know that there are many other ways. We don't know how to embrace the block of pain in us, to take care of it, so that it can be transformed. We only think of throwing away, eliminating with guns, with knives, scissors, and things like that. What a civilization we have. Therefore we have to think deeply about this and watching television can increase our bad tendency of wanting to eliminate whatever we don't want.

Television can increase your craving, your fantasy, and it does not help you to understand the hardships, the difficulties, of your parents and so on. Many programs can increase your violence, your anger, your wish to eliminate whatever you don't like. Your inability to embrace, to forbear, to help. That is why we need to look deeply. I urge that the whole family get together and have a deep discussion on this. After five days of retreat, the girl was transformed deeply because we especially took care of her. With the whole Sangha and the Sangha of young people, we had a very good program for young people at that retreat. When she got back to school she wrote a story about David and Angelina that got her a very high note from the teacher. That evening when her baby sister cried instead of kicking her or beating her, she said, "Be quiet. I am here for you my sister." She practiced the second mantra, by herself, alone. I can see in that little girl there are so many good seeds, but because of watching so many bad television programs, the good seeds had not been able to manifest. These programs only water the bad seeds in her. Going into a retreat where the setting is quite different, she was able to practice some quiet breathing, walking, surrounded by people who are calm. All these things have helped touch the good seeds within the child. Five days, only five days, helped her to transform and she became a very lovely sister.

So I am not pessimistic. I know the good seeds are in every one of us. If we have the opportunity to take care of the young people, they grow up beautifully. Mindfulness helps us to look more deeply and to reorganize our daily life. We should not allow ourselves and our children to get intoxicated every day. This is the true practice, the concrete practice, of the five mindfulness trainings and the children can very well practice it. If the adults practice, the children will follow.

One lady in England told me that during more than ten years she had the habit of taking two glasses of wine and nothing bad has happened to her. She said that she cannot take the fifth mindfulness training because she does not want to abandon her two glasses of wine, which are so good. She used many pretexts: "You know, Thay, wine is part of our civilization?" and so on. She talked a lot. She was trying to defend herself a lot. I was sitting very quietly and I did not say anything. I saw that she was very tempted to take all five mindfulness trainings. She was struggling till the last minute. Finally, I said, I know you are going to take all the five mindfulness trainings tomorrow. You say no tonight, but tomorrow you will do so. Because I know that you know very well that you are taking the five mindfulness trainings not only for yourself, but for your children. Because two glasses of wine have done no harm to you, but who knows what happens with your children. Maybe two glasses of wine can make one of your children become an alcoholic person, because your children are not exactly like you. So if you refrain from these two glasses of wine, the children will look up to you and they will naturally refrain from drinking wine.

I know children who smoke. That is because the parents smoke. So let us think like this: we practice not only for ourselves, but for our ancestors, and for our children. We practice as a *bodhisattva* for the sake of everyone; for our society, also. The next morning she took all five precepts.

So let us make a vow, make a determination, to live in such a way that can help so many people. Because when we've got that determination, there is a strong source of energy born in us and that energy will protect us from doing things that are wrong. That source of energy in Buddhism, we call *bodhicitta*, the mind of love, the mind of awakening. It makes you alive, and children, also. They can have a strong mind of love, mind of understanding. I have seen many young people support their parents and help their parents to come back to the practice. So I have faith. I wish today you will discuss a little bit on this. Your insight about the question I proposed five, six days ago was very good, wonderful.

An unhappy person, to make other people happy, to love other people, has to take care of and love himself or herself first. In Plum Village, we offer him, we offer her, the way to breathe, to walk, to stop, to embrace the feeling of pain, of sorrow. Because when you know how to take care of yourself, when you know how to love yourself, then you know how to take care and to love other people. The Buddha said that taking care of yourself, loving oneself, is the basic thing, is the basic condition, for you to take care and to love all living beings. Of course, other people can help you practice, but you have to make efforts by yourself. Peace, happiness, and joy begin with myself and then I will get the support of

other people around me. Then, later, I will be a source of support to other people around me.

[Young people] When you hear the bell, please stand up and bow.

[Bell]

Yesterday, we talked a little bit about non-fear. The Buddha knows that there is fear in each one of us. That is why he urges us to touch our fear, to embrace it. Our fear of loneliness, our fear of being abandoned, our fear of growing old, our fear of dying, our fear of being sick, and so on. You have learned that every time we embrace our fear, it will lose some of its strength; otherwise, the blocks of fear will continue to be strong in the depths of our consciousness and continue to shape our behavior.

Non-fear is the true base for true happiness. We have been learning about *Dana*, giving, generosity, and non-fear is the kind of gift that is considered to be the best, the most precious. If you can offer non-fear to someone, you offer the best kind of gift. The people who are dying may be very fearful. If you have non-fear with you, you sit with him or with her in that difficult moment of his life. You make him die peacefully without fear. This is a great gift. If you are someone who learns how to accompany the dying person, you have to cultivate your non-fear. Because without non-fear, you cannot be your best in order to help him, or help her.

There are three kinds of gifts spoken about in Buddhism. The first gift is piety. It means material gift. You give that in order to relieve the suffering of the people who are poor, who are destitute concerning the problem of housing, of food, of medicine.

The second kind of gift is the Dharma. With the Dharma, you can help people to relieve a lot of their suffering. You help people to know how to organize their lives, to do things in such a way that they can bring happiness to themselves and to their families, how to transform their suffering, how to love, and to help other people stop suffering.

Finally, the third kind of gift is called non-fear. I would like to tell you the story of a person who lived two thousand six hundred years ago, who was a lay disciple of the Buddha and who practiced giving, generosity, in such a way that he got a lot of happiness. Finally he got himself the gift of non-fear when he died because he died beautifully, peacefully, and his name is Anathapindika.

Anathapindika is one of the early lay disciples of the Buddha. Anathapindika is not his real name. His real name is Sudatta. Anathapindika is the name given to him by the people of his city because he was so generous. He was a businessman. But he wasn't so busy. He had time and energy to bring help to destitute people, the people who are alone. He used a part of his wealth to do the work of giving. It did not seem that he became less rich at all while doing so. He had a lot of friends in the business circle and he was loved by them, quite a lot. He did business with these people and got their trust and continued to help the people in his country a lot.

The first time he saw the Buddha was in the Venuvana. Venuvana means the bamboo grove in the kingdom of Magadha. He had a brother-in law living in that city, the city of Rajagaha in the Magadha kingdom. He used to come to that city several times a year to do business. He himself lived in the kingdom of Kosala, north of the Ganges River. He had a family there. The capitol of Kosala is Sravasti. So from time to time, he left Sravasti in order to go to Rajagaha. When he was there, he always stayed at his brother-in-law's home.

One day he arrived and it didn't seem that his brother-in-law took good care of him at all, not like other times. His brother-in-law was busy arranging the house as if he was about to invite the king. So he asked the question, "Dear brother, why didn't you take care of me like the other times? What are you doing? Are you inviting the king to the house or something?" And his brother-in-law said, "No, I am not inviting the king. I am inviting the Buddha." He had never heard of the Buddha. The Buddha is just a monk and some of his students.

It was the third year after his enlightenment and the Buddha was teaching in the Bamboo Grove. The Bamboo Grove had been given to him by the king of Magadha, King Bimbisara. There were more than a thousand monks already. Every time I thought of that moment of the career of the Buddha, I always felt a little bit of pity for the Buddha, because to have one thousand two hundred and fifty monks to take care of, that is big business. I am taking care of less than one hundred monks and nuns now, and I know that is not easy.

Sangha building: without big brothers, talented monks like Shariputra, Mollegana, the Buddha couldn't have been able to build a Sangha of monks and nuns like he did. It is difficult. Sangha building is what every one of us has to learn. To build a happy Sangha is for our support, our happiness. Your family is a Sangha, itself. Building a Sangha of practice is to build your own safety, your support, your happiness.

When Anathapindika heard the word "Buddha," he was struck, because he never heard such a name. It's a new name. "The Buddha, you mean?" "Yes, the Buddha." "It means the awakened one?" "Yes, it means the awakened one." So suddenly he felt in love with that name, that person. I don't know why. Things happen like that. You hear a name and suddenly you have a lot of sympathy. As if everything had been written before in your heart. And that word Buddha did not leave him?. He wanted to wait until tomorrow to see the Buddha and a number of disciples coming, but he couldn't wait. He had a hard time going to sleep at night. He woke up three or four times during the night thinking that it was already sunrise. Finally, he thought that the sun is rising. They did not have any clock then. He set out and said, "I am going to welcome the Buddha. Maybe I will see him on the street, because I know the way to Venuvana."

This year, a number of us from Plum Village, we sat in Venuvana for lunch with the Indian children just a few months ago. But it was not really the morning. He went alone and he continue to walk until he arrive at Venuvana. It was still very early in the morning. All the monks were still sleeping and it was dark in the bamboo grove. He sat down and suddenly he saw in the fog someone coming, although he did not see very clearly. Finally, he realized that this person may be the Buddha. So they had a few sentences in exchange and he was so happy to meet the Buddha and he recognized in the Buddha his real teacher. So they sat down for a conversation, about a half an hour only, and they love each other. He invited the Buddha to come to his kingdom for a teaching, the kingdom of Kosala.

That day, the Buddha went to the house of his brother-in law. After having lunch, he gave a Dharma discourse and that helped Anathapindika to learn more about the teachings of the Buddha. He was determined to invite the Buddha to come to his country to teach. The next day, toward the end of the day, he asked his brother-in-law to allow him to use his house to make an offering to the Buddha again. He wanted the Buddha to come the next day. After having visited the Buddha a few times, he got the agreement of the Buddha that the Buddha would go to the kingdom of Kosala, the city of Sravasti, to bring the teaching there.

He was so happy. He asked one of the monks to go with him to make the preparation. Shariputra, one of the high monks in the order, agreed to go with him. They set out on foot to go to the kingdom of Kosala. On the way, they spread the news that the Buddha, a great teacher, is coming and you have to prepare yourself in order to welcome him. When they got back to the city of Sravasti, he looked hard to find a piece of land, because he wanted to keep the Buddha in his country. The Buddha is such a jewel. The Buddha may come and



teach and may go back to Venuvana, and he wanted the Buddha to stay longer, much longer, in his kingdom.

He was looking very hard for a beautiful place. Finally he found a place, a beautiful park, very close to the city. He found out that the park belonged to Prince Jeta. He visited the prince and asked the prince to sell it to him in order for him to offer it to the Buddha and his congregation. Jeta said, "Well, this park is my pleasure. The king has given it to me and I want to keep it for my own pleasure." Anathapindika talks about the Buddha. "If you consent to sell it to me, then I will make it into a beautiful practice center for the Buddha and his monks." And he insisted. Prince Jeta in order to dissuade him said, "Well, if you have enough gold to cover the ground of the park, then I will sell it to you. Anathapindika thought for one or two minutes and said, "Yes, I will do that. I will have enough gold to cover the park and I will buy it." And then the prince said, "That is a joke. That is a joke. I don't want to sell." But Anathapindika said, "Your excellency, you know that you are the crown prince and anything a person like you says should not be a joke. You have said so and I have agreed." He went and sought advice of a lawyer. Then the lawyer advised Jeta, the prince, to sell it to him because he had made a declaration as a joke.

So finally Anathapindika brought a cart of gold to come and cover the place. They so impressed Prince Jeta. "Who is the Buddha that this person agreed to spend all of his fortune to buy a piece of land for him?" He was so impressed that when the gold was spread about two thirds of the ground he said, "Well, I offer the third part. You don't have to bring any more gold. And I also offer all the trees in the park." That is why nowadays we call it the Anathapindika Park with the Jeta Trees.

Then quickly, he built the monastery. Very quickly, because he had found the object of his true love. He spent a lot of time, energy building the practice center for the Buddha and his monks. Anathapindika took a lot of pleasure serving the Buddha, serving the Sangha. His family did not know anything about Buddhism. They had to learn a lot from other teachers. But this time, they were very united as a family. He had three daughters and one son. He also had a young brother named Subbutti. Subbutti later became a very illustrious monk. You learn about him in the *Diamond Sutra*. Subbutti, the one who practice the deep vision on emptiness.

They came to listen to the Dharma talk given by the Buddha at the Jeta Grove every week. The Jeta Grove became a very beautiful and famous practice center. The King of Kosala also came and listened and became a student and a very good friend of the Buddha. The King of Kosala was born in the same year as the

Buddha. After he had become a student of the Buddha, he continued to learn and to practice. Finally they became very good, very close friends. You know that the Buddha died at the age of eighty. King Pasenadi of Kosala also died just a few months before the Buddha.

The third daughter of Anathapindika learned Buddhism very well. She practiced very well. She was wedded to a governor of a nearby country called Anga. The daughter introduced the governor to the teaching of the Buddha and he became a very good supporter of the Buddha Dharma, also. Anathapindika's family was a very happy family, and their happiness came from the joy of supporting the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. They were very united with each other.

One day the Buddha learned that Anathapindika was very sick. That was about thirty years later. He went to visit Anathapindika. His beloved lay disciples. Anathapindika said that he has only one thing that he is sorry about. He is very satisfied with his life, his family, his practice. He is only sorry about one thing: that he is too weak to come to the Jena Grove every week to listen to the Dharma talk. He wanted to be there at every Dharma talk of the Buddha. The Buddha said, "I will send my disciples to you, my disciples are me, to take care of you and help you to practice even if you cannot come to the Jena Grove." Venerable Shariputra was also a very close friend of Anathapindika. He used to come visit him very often and help him. One morning Shariputra learned that Anathapindika was dying. He thought that maybe this would be his last visit and he asked his younger brother in the Dharma, Ānanda, to come along.

When they arrive, Anathapindika could not sit up in his bed. Shariputra said, "No my friend, don't try. Just lay down quietly. We will bring a few chairs close to you and we will be together." The first question he asked is "Dear friend, Anathapindika, how do you feel? Is the pain in your body increasing or has it begun to decrease?" Anathapindika said, "No, Venerables, the pain in me is not decreasing. It is increasing all the time." There upon, Shariputra proposed that three of them practice together the practice of the recollections of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Shariputra is one of the most intelligent disciples of the Buddha. He knew that Anathapindika received a lot of pleasure every time he served the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. He wanted to water the seeds of happiness in the store consciousness of Anathapindika.

He began to invite Ānanda and Anathapindika to breathe in and breathe out and focus their attention on the person of the Buddha, on the virtues of the Buddha. After that, they meditated on the Dharma, the Dharma that can bring relief right away. The moment you begin to practice you get calm, you get transformation right away. If you don't know how to practice mindful breathing, you cannot get

the calm and the well-being, but if you know how to practice mindful breathing, mindful walking, you begin to get some calm, some stability right away. The Dharma is something that does not require time, a lot of time. You can touch the Dharma. You can touch the effect of your practice right in this life, right today. The Sangha is a body of practitioners who are always there for you, supporting you every moment. Especially when you need her, the Sangha is for you. So after the practice of the recollection on the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, Anathapindika restored the balance. He suffered much less and he was able to smile.

At that time, Shariputra proposed that they continue the practice. They practiced about looking deeply into their six sense organs, the objects of these six senses, and also the consciousnesses that arise from the contact between the six organs and the objects.

In *The Chanting Book of Plum Village*—this is an old version, the new version has been printed in America and will be available in a few months—there is a discourse called *The Teachings to be Given to the Sick*. I would like to invite you to study this discourse. I translated the sutra from the Chinese, but I also consulted an equivalent text in the Pali canon.

Let us practice like this. Breathing in, I know that this body is not me. Breathing out, I feel I am not caught in this body. In fact, they begin with eyes. These eyes are not me. I am not caught by these eyes. Eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—six things. They always begin with eyes. Breathing in, I know that these eyes are not me. I am not caught in these eyes. I am life without boundaries. These eyes have a beginning. These eyes can disintegrate, but I am not caught in these eyes. They begin with the eyes and continue with the nose, the ears, the tongue, the body, and the mind.

Then they switch to the objects of the six senses. These forms are not me. I am not caught in these forms. These sounds are not me. I am not caught in these sounds. Because the dying person may be attached to forms, sounds, body, mind, et cetera, considering these things to be self, considering that they are losing these, they are losing self.

After having meditated on the six senses and their objects and the six kinds of consciousnesses, they begin to meditate on the four elements. Breathing in, I know the element water is in me. Breathing out, I know that the element water is not me. I am not caught in the element of water. When you breathe and you meditate like that, you see that the water is everywhere, around you, inside of

you. Water is not you. You are more than water. You are not caught by the element of water.

And you meditate also on the element of heat. The heat in me is not me. I am not caught by the heat in me. The heat is everywhere. You do not consider the heat to be yourself. Breathing in I realize the element of earth in me. Breathing out, I know that I am not the earth. The element earth is not me and I am not caught in the element called earth. So they continue like that with the elements air, with the four elements.

And they come to the five aggregates we have learned in the last few days: form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness. Breathing in, I know that form is not me. I am not limited by form. Feelings are not me. I am not limited by feelings. Perceptions are not me. I am not caught by the perceptions. Mental formations are not me. I am not these mental formations. Consciousness is not me. I am not caught by this consciousness. Then they practice looking into the nature of causes and conditions?

Anathapindika was practicing because he knows the two monks very well. They are both beloved disciples of the Buddha and are sitting there to support him so he could do the meditation easily. First of all, he meditated in order to restore the balance in him so that the pain in him would not bother him too much. And finally he was concentrated enough in order to follow the other kind of meditation. "Friend Anathapindika, everything that is arises because of causes and conditions. Everything that is has the nature not to be born and not to die, not to arrive and not to depart." These are very deep teachings. When the body arises, it arises. It does not come from anywhere. If conditions are sufficient, the body manifests itself and you perceive it as existing. When the conditions are no longer sufficient, the body is not perceived by you and you may think of it as not existing. In fact, the nature of everything is the nature of no-birth and no-death. Shariputra was giving the best teaching of the Buddha to Anathapindika in this very critical moment of his life. Everything that is comes to be because of a combination of causes. When the causes and conditions are sufficient, the body is present. When the causes and conditions are not sufficient, the body is absent. The same is true with ears, nose, eyes, tongue, and mind; form, sound, smell, taste, touch and so on.

These lines may be a little bit abstract to you, but it is possible for all of us to get a deep understanding, a deep experience of it. You have to know the true nature of death, the true nature of dying, in order to understand really the true nature of living. If you don't understand what is death, you don't understand what is life, also. Therefore, it is very important to know the nature of birth and death. The

teaching of the Buddha is to relieve us of suffering and the base of suffering is ignorance, ignorance about the true nature of yourself, of things around you. Since you don't understand, you are too afraid and fear has brought you a lot of suffering. That is why the offering of non-fear is the best kind of offering you can make to someone.

[Bell]

We have ideas. We talk about it, but we may not have a real understanding of the words we use, the ideas we have. In our mind, to die means from some one you suddenly become no one. You cease to be. You cease to exist. That is our understanding. In the same way, we think of birth as our beginning. What does it mean to be born? To be born means from nothing, you suddenly become something. From no one, you suddenly become someone. That is our definition of birth and death. Because of these notions, we have kept our fear in us for too long. The Buddha invites us to bring our fear up and look deeply into the object of our fear: fear of dying, fear of non-being. That is the cream of the Buddha's teaching. You cannot afford not to learn it because this is the best thing in the teaching of the Buddha.

There are many non-Buddhists who have discovered the reality of no-birth and no-death. Let us talk about, for instance, the French scientist Lavoisier. He looked deeply into the nature of things and he declared that nothing is born and nothing can die: "*Rien ne se crée, rien ne se perd.*" I don't think that he had studied Buddhist sutras.

Suppose we tried to practice with a sheet of paper because a sheet of paper is what we call a thing. Let us practice together like Anathapindika, Shariputra, and Ánanda, looking deeply into this sheet of paper. You may think that the sheet of paper has a birthday and will have a day of dying. We may imagine a day when the piece of paper is produced from nothing; it suddenly becomes something, a sheet of paper. Is it possible? When you look into the sheet of paper in this very moment, you don't have to go back to someday. Just look at it in the present moment. Into the true nature of the paper you see what? You see that the piece of paper is made of non-paper elements. This is a very scientific way of looking, because you don't accept anything that is not evident.

When I touch the sheet of paper, I touch the tree, the forest, because I know that deep inside there is the existence of the trees, the forest. If you return the element tree back to the forest, the sheet of paper cannot be here. Right? I also touch the sunshine. Even at midnight touching the sheet of paper, I touch sunshine. Because sunshine is one element called non-paper elements that has made up the

paper. Because without sunshine, no tree can grow. So touching the tree, I touch the sunshine.

I touch the cloud. There is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. You don't have to be a poet to see the cloud in a sheet of paper. Because without a cloud, there would be no rain and no forest can grow. So the cloud is in there. The trees are in there. The sunshine, the minerals from the earth, the earth, time, space, people, insects—everything in the cosmos seem to be existing in this sheet of paper. If you look deeply, you find that everything in the cosmos is present in this moment in the sheet of paper. If you send one of these elements back to its source, the paper would not be there. That is why it is very important to see that a sheet of paper is made of, only of, non-paper elements. Our body is like that also.

So is it possible to say that from nothing, something has come into existence? From nothing, can you have something? No. Because before we perceive it as a sheet of paper, it had been sunshine. It had been trees. It had been clouds. The paper hasn't come from nothing: *Rien ne se crée*. Nothing has been created. The day you believe to be the birthday of the sheet of paper is something we call a continuation day. Before that day, it had been something else, many things even, and on that day it was perceived as a sheet of paper. So the next time, when you celebrate your birthday, instead of singing happy birthday, you sing happy continuation day. We have done that to a number of friends. Happy continuation day.

The true nature of this sheet of paper, is the nature of no-birth: *Rien ne se crée, rien ne se perd*. Our true nature is also the nature of no-birth. Our birth certificate is misleading. It was certified that we were born on that day from such and such hospital or city. We accepted to begin to be on that day, but we know very well that we had been there in the womb of our mother long before that. From nothing, how can you become something? From no one, how can you become someone? Even before the day of your conception in your mother, you had been there. In your father, in your mother, and everywhere else, also. So if you try to go back, you cannot find a beginning of you. You have been there for a long time and everywhere.

People think they can eliminate what they don't want: they can burn they can kill. But it's not by destroying that they can reduce something to nothing. They killed Mahatma Gandhi. They shot Martin Luther King. But these people continue to be among us in many forms and their being continues. Their spirit continues.

Let us now try to eliminate this sheet of paper. Let us try to burn it to see whether we are capable of making it into nothing. Anyone has a match? I have the element water, but I don't have the element fire, so I am calling for the element fire. Please follow your breathing. Observe to see if it is possible to reduce something to nothing.

Ash is what you can see. If you have observed, you see that some smoke has come up and that is a continuation of the sheet of paper. Now the sheet of paper has become part of a cloud in the sky. You may meet it again tomorrow in the form of a raindrop on your forehead. But maybe you will not be mindful and you will not know that this is a meeting. You may think that the raindrop is foreign to you, but it may just be the sheet of paper into which you have practiced looking deeply. The way it is now, is it nothing? No, I don't think the sheet of paper has become nothing. Part of it has become the cloud. You can say, "Goodbye, see you again one day in one form or another."

It is very difficult to follow the path of a sheet of paper. It is as difficult as to find God. Some heat has penetrated into my body. I almost burned my fingers. It has penetrated into your body, also. It has gone very far. If you have fine equipment you could measure the impact of the heat even from a distant star. Because the impact of a small thing on the whole cosmos can be measured. It has produced some change in my organism, in your organism, and in the cosmos, also. The sheet of paper continues to be there, present. It is difficult for our conceptual eyes to see and discern but we know that it is always there and everywhere, also. And this little amount of ash may be returned to the earth later on. Maybe next year when you come back to Plum Village, you will see it in the form of a little flower or part of a plum leaf. We don't know. But we do know that nothing died. Nothing has become nothingness. So the true nature of the sheet of paper is no-death.

Looking deeply into our self, our body, our feelings, our perceptions. Looking into the mountains, the rivers, to another person, we have to be able to see, to touch the nature of no-birth and no-self in them. This is one of the practices that are very important in the Buddhist tradition.

In the teaching, you may distinguish two dimensions of reality. The first dimension is called historical dimension and the second dimension is called ultimate dimension. We should be able to touch both dimensions if we have enough concentration and mindfulness. Mindfulness and concentration cultivated by our daily practice must be used to look deeply into the nature of what is there.

When we look into the ocean, we can see the waves, different kinds of waves. Some are very big; some are very small. It seems that each wave has its private existence, its birth and its death. A wave can have a lot of complexes. I am smaller than you. I am less important than you. You are more beautiful than me. My life is short. I will no longer be here in a few minutes, a few seconds, and things like that. Ideas like beginning, end, high, low, more beautiful, less beautiful, being here, not being here, all these ideas are assaulting the wave all the time. It cannot live its life as a wave in a peaceful happy way. We are very much the same. We are assailed by so many ideas including the ideas of birth and death, the idea of being and non-being, and we are scared. We get scared. Because of that fear, true happiness is not possible. So deep looking helps us to remove the fear.

According to the teachings, everything that is there is of the nature of no-birth and no-death. When conditions are sufficient, they appear to you. You have a perception of it and you say "This is." When one of the conditions is not there and you cannot perceive it, you say "It is not there." That is non-being. You are caught by the idea of being and non-being. When you see it differently, when you see it for the first time in a form that you have not seen before, you think that it has been born. When you don't recognize it anymore, you cannot have the same kind of perception, you say that "It has died." That is why we have to learn to look deeply in order to touch the realm of no ideas, no perceptions.

In Buddhism, there is a word that upsets many people. That is *nirvana*. Nirvana means extinction. Touching nirvana is the purpose of our practice. But a good question may be asked: extinction of what? It is like the word emptiness. The word emptiness is also very scary because it can provoke the feeling of non-being. Annihilation. Nothingness. We have to learn what words like nirvana or emptiness really mean. One of the best ways is to ask questions. "Dear Buddha, what do you mean? Emptiness? Empty of what? What do we mean by extinction? Extinction of what?"

Extinction first means extinction of ideas, like ideas of birth and death, being and non-being. When you practice looking deeply into the nature of a wave, you have a chance to find out that a wave is made of water. While this is a wave, it is at the same time water. It is possible for a wave to live its life as a wave, and to live its life as the life of water at the same time. This is important. As a wave, she thinks that she has a beginning and an end, high, low, being, and non-being. She thinks that before this, non-being, and after this, non-being. And this is her life span and she is a separate entity. If we look deeply, we see that this wave is made of all the other waves. If we study deeply, we see that the movements of all other waves have combined to make this wave possible. In this wave, you can



touch all the other waves. It 's like when you touch the sheet of paper, you touch all the other non-paper elements in it. So what the wave would call itself is really made of non-self elements. So the idea of a self is an idea to be removed in order for you to touch reality. The self is made of non-self elements. The moment when you realize that, you lose all your fear.

This body is not me. These eyes are not me. I am not caught by these eyes. So if you identify yourself with this life span, if you identify yourself with that hate, and if you imagine that you are separated from everything, you are not this, you are wrong, because you are everything at the same time. The wave while living the life of a wave may like to bend down and touch her true nature, the nature of water. All these ideas, beginning, end, high, low, this, that, more or less beautiful, all these ideas can be applied somehow to the wave, but they cannot be applied to water. So wave and all these ideas can be described as the historical dimension and water can be described as the ultimate dimension. And you have your ultimate dimension. Your ultimate dimension is the dimension of no-birth and no-death. Because we cannot talk about water in terms of beginning, end, high, low, like the way you talk about a wave.

Sunyata, emptiness, is a very important term in Buddhism. Very misleading, also. If you look deeply into this sheet of paper, you see that it is full. It is full of everything in the cosmos: the sunshine, the trees, the clouds, the earth, the minerals, everything. Except for one thing. It is empty of one thing only—a separate self. The sheet of paper cannot be by itself alone. It has to inter-be with everything else in the cosmos. That is why the word inter-be can be more helpful than the word to be. To be means to inter-be. The sheet of paper cannot be without sunshine, cannot be without the forest. The sheet of paper has to inter-be with the sunshine, to inter-be with the forest. To be together—that is the real meaning of interdependent co-production.

If you ask how the world comes into existence, into being, the Buddha would say in very simple terms: "This is because that is. This is not because that is not." Because the sunshine is, the sheet of paper is. Because the tree is, the sheet of paper is. You cannot be by yourself, alone. You have to inter-be with everything else in the cosmos. That is the nature of inter-being. I don't think that this word is in the dictionary, but I believe that it will be there soon, because it is helpful to see the real nature of things, the nature of inter-being

Emptiness means the absence of a separate self. If you are locked into the idea of a separate self, you have great fear. But if you look and you are capable of seeing "you" everywhere, you lose that fear. I have practiced as a monk. I have practiced looking deeply every day. I don't just give Dharma talks. I can see me

in my students. I can see me in my ancestors. I can see my continuation everywhere in this moment. I have not been able to go back to my country in the past thirty years. I went out in order to call for peace, to stop the killing, and I was not allowed to go home by many succeeding governments. Yet, I feel that I am there, very real. Many new students of monks and nuns have come up. I have not seen them directly, but they have learned from me through books, tapes, and other disciples who have gone to Vietnam. I don't have that kind of painful feeling of a person being in exile because many friends of mine go to Vietnam and they feel my presence there even stronger than in other countries, including France. I see myself in my students. Every effort I make every day is to transmit the best that I have received from my teachers, from my practice, to my students. That is done with love.

I don't think that I will cease to be someday. I told my friends that the twenty-first century is a hill, a beautiful hill, and we shall be climbing together as a Sangha and I will be with them all the way, true. So for me that is not a problem because I have seen everyone in me, me in everyone. That is the practice of looking deeply, the practice of emptiness, the practice of inter-being.

Anathapindika was learning and practicing these teachings in the last moments of his life. Suddenly, Ānanda saw Anathapindika cry. He felt sorry for the lay person. He said, "Dear friend why are you crying? Did you regret anything? Do you regret anything? Did you fail in your practice?" Anathapindika said, "No, Lord Ānanda, I don't regret anything. I am so happy and I practice so well. It is wonderful to practice with your presence here supporting me. Well, I practice very well." "Why do you cry then?" "I cry because I am so moved. I have been a supporter of the Buddha and the Sangha for more than thirty years, but I have never learned and practiced a teaching that is wonderful like this." He was so happy the last moment of his life. He suddenly got the greatest gift he ever got—no fear. Ānanda said "Dear friend, you don't know, but this kind of teaching, we monks and nuns receive almost every day." Anathapindika said, "Lord Ānanda, I have a request. My last request. Please go home and tell Lord Buddha that although many of us are too busy in our lay life, there are those of us who are capable of receiving and have the time to practice this wonderful teaching. Please tell the Lord to dispense this teaching to us, also, the lay people." Ānanda agreed to do so. And that was the last statement made by the layperson, Anathapindika.

The story you can read in *The Teachings to be Given to the Sick*. I wish that you have the time to take care of this very important practice, the practice of non-fear, the practice of looking deeply to relieve in yourself the deep fear that is always there. If you have non-fear in you, your life will be more beautiful, happier, and you can help many people. Non-fear has an energy as a base for social action, for

actions of compassion, to protect people, to protect the earth, to satisfy your needs to love and to serve. Non-fear is very important.

Omega Institute is a place where we shall be leading a retreat for one thousand people this Fall. I had been there several times. Omega is a place in the northern part of New York state. One day I was going there for a retreat with Sister Chan Khong and a number of friends. We learned that our friend, Alfred Hassler, was dying in a hospital on the way. So we decided to stop and to visit Alfred. He had been a very strong supporter for peace in Vietnam—for ending the war in Vietnam. I came out of Vietnam to call for peace and I made a lot of friends in Europe and in America while working to end the war in Vietnam. Alfred Hassler was one of the friends who strongly supported that effort. He was then director of a peace organization called Fellowship of Reconciliation.

When we arrived in the hospital, he was being fed with serum glucose and he was in a coma. His daughter, Laura, was there. Laura had helped us in the Buddhist Peace Delegation in Paris contacting other peace delegations in the Paris peace talks. And Dorothy, his wife, was there. When they saw us, they were so happy. They did not dream that we could make our way to the place where Alfred was dying.

Laura tried to wake Alfred up, but she could not. Alfred was in a deep coma. I think that the hospital was trying their best to help him. He was in a very difficult state. I decided to ask Sister Chan Khong to sing to Alfred a song I wrote using words from a sutra: "This body is not me. I am not caught by this body. I am life without boundaries. I have never been born. I will never died. Look at me. Look at the stars and the moon. All of them are me, are manifestations of me. So smile to me, take my hand, say goodbye that we will see each other right away after this. We will see each other in every walk of life. We will recognize each other again and again, everywhere." Sister Chan Khong began to sing this song.

After she finished singing for the second time, Alfred came back. He woke up. It was like a miracle. Please don't think that if someone is in a coma, he is not there or she is not there. She is there in a certain way. If you are to accompany a dying person, you have to be there also—to be there body and mind united in mindfulness, solid without fear. And you have to talk to him, to sing to him or to her, because there is a way that person can hear you. This is very true in many circumstances. Don't just sit there. Talk to him. Talk to her. Sing to him. Tell stories. This is my experience. Many people come back, wake up because of that.

Laura was so happy. She said "Alfred." She called her father. "Alfred," she said, "Do you know that Thay is here? Do you know that Sister Chan Khong is here?" Alfred could not talk, but his eyes proved that he was aware that we were there. Sister Chan Khong began to talk to him, recalling the experiences that we had had working together to stop the war in Vietnam. "Alfred, do you remember that day you were visiting the monk, Tri Quang in Anh Quan? Temple? The United States had just given the order to bomb Hanoi and Thay Tri Quang refused to see any westerners, pacifist or not. He didn't want to see you and you sit outside and you slip in a sheet of paper and you said, 'I will not live until you see me. I will go on a fast?. I am a pacifist. I have come for you, for the people of Vietnam, and not to support the bombing in Hanoi.' And fifteen minutes later, the Venerable opened the door and with a broad smile invited you. Do you remember that, Alfred? "

"Alfred, do you remember the time we organized a peace demonstration in Rome? There were three hundred Catholic priests wearing the names of three hundred Buddhist monks in the jail of Vietnam because these monks refused to be drafted into the army. Remember these things?" In fact, she was doing exactly the things that Shariputra was doing to Anathapindika. Watering the seeds of happiness, because Alfred got a lot of happiness working for peace. When you are able to do something for the cause of your life, you are happy.

During that time, I was doing massage to Alfred's feet. Because when you die, you may get a little bit numb and you don't have the feeling that your body is there. So it is very helpful to massage him or her. "Alfred do you know that Thay is massaging your feet?" And Alfred, although he could not say anything, his eyes proved that he was aware. We continued like that for five, seven minutes. And suddenly, suddenly, Alfred opened his mouth and pronounced a word. "Wonderful. Wonderful." Two times. And after that he sank back into a coma. We waited for a half hour or more and we have to go to the retreat in Omega.

Before leaving, I told Dorothy, his wife, and Laura, his daughter, to continue the practice—talking to him, singing to him, evoking the good memories. I had to give an orientation talk that night. Early in the morning, I got the news that Alfred passed away just a few hours after we left, peacefully, without pain. It's wonderful to have friends who understand you and support you in this difficult moment. It's wonderful to be able to be there for your friend in this very difficult moment, but you have to cultivate so that you'll be solid, you'll be without fear. Because that is the best way that you can help the other person.

This teaching of the Buddha about non-fear, about no-birth and no-death is the cream of the whole body of the teaching. You have come to Plum Village in order

to learn techniques to get more solidity, to transform some of your sufferings. Yes, that is good, but don't miss the opportunity. This is a kind of invitation for you to go deeper, to learn, and to practice so that you become someone who has a great capacity for being solid, calm, without fear, because our society needs people like you who have these qualities. And your children, our children, need people like this in order to go on.

It's forty-four minutes after noon. So we shall have a walking meditation after this. After fifteen minutes of break, we will have a formal lunch a little bit late today. Everyone is invited to the formal lunch. This is to show you how they practice in Buddhist monasteries during retreat. We make the ritual very short—reduce it to the minimum—for you to have a taste. It may be a great joy to participate in such a meal. You see the monks and nuns in their orange robes, holding their bowls. Please participate in all the lunch. We will eat in such a way that peace, joy, and stability will be possible during the time of eating. It is a real practice. From the time you hold the bowl and look into the bowl, you begin already to practice. When you fill the bowl with the food, you also practice mindful breathing. There are many gatas, short poems, for you to breathe along with so that you dwell in mindfulness. You just look at the brothers and sisters, the monastic people and the Tiep Hien people in order to see how they do it. Because the practice is to be mindful in every moment. When you have gotten your food, you practice walking meditation to this hall and you sit down. You place the bowl or the plate in front of you and you begin to practice sitting meditation. Not waiting. Waiting is not a practice.

Enjoy your sitting. Enjoy your breathing. Enjoy the collective energy of the Sangha. The monks and the nuns have wooden spoons so that they can eat very, very quietly without producing any noise. Unfortunately we don't have wooden spoons for everyone, so do your best not to produce noise and you will feel the atmosphere of the monastery. Every movement of your spoon, of your fork, should be mindful. You chew your food slowly and you become aware of what you are eating. During the meal, become aware of the food. Each morsel of food is an ambassador coming from the whole cosmos just like the sheet of paper. Chew thirty times and be aware of what you are chewing. Don't chew your sorrow, your projects, your worries—just enjoy the food and pay attention also to the community of brothers and sisters around you. Just two objects of your mindfulness: the food and the community of practice.

There will be some chanting—not too much. The monks and nuns, they have their traditional bowls. They will hold the bowl with this mudra. Two fingers to support the bowl and three fingers to keep it from falling. Like this. And with the other hand, they practice the mudra of peace. They hold the bowl like this and

they chant and offer the food to all the Buddhas in the cosmos, all the *bodhisattvas* in the present moment who are everywhere in the world trying to relieve suffering. During that time, their spoon is stuck into the food with the concave face outward.

Then after the chanting, I think about two minutes or less, there will be an offering to share the food with other living beings. This is a symbol. A small quantity of food will be put in a small bowl like this with water. Then everyone will do the concentration in order to touch all living beings who need the food to survive. We pour our compassion, our understanding, into the food. Then one novice will go to a window and chant a gata of four lines inviting all living beings to come and receive the food. That is to nourish the compassion in us. The tradition began at the time of the Buddha. Every time they ate, they always put aside a little bit of their food to share with the animals and the insects around them.

Then we will practice the five contemplations. We enjoy our meal silently and mindfully and you will feel the spirit of fellowship, sisterhood, while of eating. So please join us, especially those of you who have not had this experience. This will be very rewarding.

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# Practices for the Twenty-first Century

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Good morning my dear friends.

Today is the twenty-first of July 1996. We are in the Lower Hamlet. Today we speak English.

In my mind, the twenty-first century is like a hill, a beautiful hill with so many beautiful trees and paths and flowers and children. There will be only four more years before we start climbing the hill of the twenty-first century. You know a century is a period of one hundred years. I count on climbing it with you all. We should plan our climbing in such a way that joy, happiness is possible. We are now in the year 1996. If you have ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine and then two thousand, only four kilometers. And we only have four years left to prepare ourselves for the next century.

The twenty-first century is somehow like a beautiful garden. We expect to have flowers, fruit, beautiful trees, beautiful streams of rivers -- a beautiful garden where every living being has a chance to live, has a right to be. Not only the human person, but also the squirrel, also the snail, also the snake, will have their place in that garden of the twenty-first century. We shall have the coconut trees there; we shall have the kiwi tree, mango and so on. We will have all kind of animals. In order to have such a beautiful garden, a beautiful hill to climb and to be in, we have to prepare ourselves. If you don't feel ready yet, then you have to come together to discuss the strategy, how to begin the twenty-first century with confidence.

You know, the organic gardeners are very wise. They know to preserve the garbage, and they can transform the garbage back into compost. With that kind of compost, they can grow beautiful flowers, beautiful vegetables and trees. In the kitchen of the Buddha, we learn that the garbage may be useful. If you do not know how to take care of the garbage, then there will be a mess. You cannot live. But if you know how to take care of the garbage, then the garbage will become something very useful for us, to make our garden more beautiful, to make our hill more beautiful.

During the Twentieth century we have produced a lot of garbage, too much. The suffering of the war in Vietnam, is a lot of garbage. The garbage is still there, not only in Vietnam, but in America. The garbage produced by the Vietnam War is still delivered all over America as a nation. The suffering is still there, not only in the veterans, in their families, but in the deep consciousness of all Americans. And not only Vietnamese and Americans suffer because of that garbage produced by the Vietnam War, but all of us in Europe, in Australia, in Africa. All of us suffered because of the garbage produced during so many, many years.

We have produced a lot of garbage everywhere. In the former Yugoslavia the garbage is still intact. No one has taken care to transform the garbage. In the Middle East, the Gulf War also produced a lot of garbage. It produced a lot of garbage in the world and it also produced a lot of garbage in our heart, in our consciousness. To take good care of the garbage is to collect them and to put them together in a heap. Maybe you have to dig a hole, you dump the garbage in, you produce some heat, you water the garbage. The organic gardeners, especially, they know how to



take care of the garbage and transform it into compost. So our suffering, the suffering we have caused, is all garbage. We should know how to good care of it order to transform them.

Who are the specialists? They are developed countries who are thinking of transporting garbage and dumping it on the Third World countries. That's not very responsible. We have only four years, before we start climbing the twenty-first century. We have to learn how to take care of our garbage now, so that at beginning of the new century we have enough compost to nourish our flower.

Today I want to talk to the children about the home they will live in in the twenty-first century. I have some vision about what we call the home of the twenty-first century. How can we organize our home in the twenty-first century so that we may live better? Architects have been working on it a lot, the habitat of the twenty-first century. We want to bring our contribution. I think the home of the twenty-first century should have a room called the breathing room, a room where we can seek asylum from aggression, from noise, from rough speech, from anger, from afflictions. Every home has to be equipped with such a room. It is equivalent to our meditation hall here at Plum Village. It is a sacred place. It does not need to be big, but it should be a real place for peace. It may be three meters by three meters, or even smaller, but it should be a real place of peace.

Every time you want to enter this room you have to bow, because this is the territory of the Buddha, the territory of peace, of compassion. Facing peace and compassion we have to be very respectful. So before entering this room you should breathe in and out and you bow to the knob of the door, because the moment you touch the knob of the door you touch the Buddha, you touch God, you touch Jesus, you touch the kingdom of heaven. Our modern home should house the kingdom of heaven inside, should house the Pure Land inside. Please children, think, meditate on this and tell us your ideas, our home of the twenty-first century.

Every time mommy is angry, every time papa is shouting at mommy, at your brother or your sister, you feel hell in your house. You don't want to dwell in hell. You want to escape. Where can you go? The answer is the pure land, the kingdom of peace that is in your home. Go to that room, bow deeply to the door, breathe in and out, softly touch the knob of the door, turn it slowly, open it and step into it with mindfulness. There is only one way of stepping into the kingdom of peace and that is walking meditation, and you have learned that in Plum Village. Breathing in, I calm myself and I make a step, breathing out I smile and then I can step into the kingdom of peace. My daddy has no right to pursue me into that territory of peace and shout after me. Because once you are in that territory of peace, you have something like diplomatic immunity. No one can pursue you into the territory of the country of peace, of the Buddha.

I think the children will profit a lot from this room. How should we call this room? "Breathing room" is okay, but I guess that there are many much more beautiful names that you can use to name this room that is in our house. Every civilized family should have such a room, because in each house there are rooms for everything: a place for eating, a place for watching television, a place for guest, a place to do laundry. We have all kind of rooms, except the kind of room we need the most, a room where we can restore our peace, we can restore our dignity. A room where we can touch the Buddha, we can touch our ancestors, we can touch our peace and our happiness.

We should tell our architects, we should tell our artists, to design that room in such a way that when we enter into that room we feel peace at once. A little bit like every time we step into the meditation hall we feel something sacred. You are not supposed to talk loudly in the meditation hall, you are not suppose to run in the meditation hall, because this is a place where people can go back to themselves, and touch the depth of themselves. That is why I always ask the children after the Dharma talk to go out of the meditation hall in the style of walking meditation.

So we should house the kingdom of peace in our modern home. What about furniture in that room? You have to think about this and tell us. What do you think is needed? I think it would need a few cushions. I think it would need a little table, so that you can place on it a beautiful flower vase; because a flower or a beautiful branch can very much represent the beauty of the cosmos. You might like to spend one hour just to arrange a flower vase that has only one flower, a few leaves. During the time you arrange the flower vase, you practice peace, and you touch peace deeply within your self. So in this beautiful room you have a few cushions, you have a little table where you can put a beautiful flower. When you go in, you may bow to the flower. The flower is fresh, and you want to be fresh as the flower. "Breathing in I see myself as a flower, breathing out, I feel fresh." You know all of us were originally flowers. Look at the children. They look exactly like flowers, very fresh, very refreshing, and that is why I love to be surrounded by children. They make you feel young and fresh.

[Bell]

The children might be angry at times, the children might be jealous at times, but they can always return to being a flower very easily. That is a miracle. But we adults, it's not that easy. We cannot return, go back to our state of being fresh very quickly. All adults have been children. Our original happiness, not original sin, is being a child. But because we have not been able to take good care of our flower, our flower is not very fresh when we grow up. So to practice meditation is to protect our flower-ness, not to let ourselves wither because of what is happening in our daily life. Look at the children, their eyes are really flowers, their mouths are flowers, their little hands are two beautiful flowers, their little teeth are flowers, very beautiful, very fresh. Every time you go into the meditation hall, you look at the flower, you bow to it, and you recover your flower-ness. "Breathing in I see myself as a flower": that is not wishful thinking, because you were originally a flower. It is possible for you to return to the state of a flower.

Maybe because you have cried a lot, that is why your eyes are not as limpid and as fresh as the eyes of children. But if you practice for few months, touching the refreshing elements within you and around you, you will recover the flower-ness of your eyes. When we look at you through your eyes, we can touch the flower-ness in you. Your smile is also a flower. If you have lost your smile, don't be discouraged. The dandelion is still keeping it for you. If you know how to look at the dandelion and you breathe and you smile the flower will hand it back to you, your flower. It's not difficult. The full moon, the blue sky, everything in the cosmos is still keeping your smile for you. They are very kind. You need only to touch them and you ask for your smile back. We need you to smile.

What else do we need as furniture in the breathing room, meditation room? I think we need something to burn, incense. I prefer a very light kind of incense, not too strong. You don't have to burn a lot of incense. There are people who go to the temple and burn a whole bunch of incense, it can be very suffocating. Just one stick of incense, the kind of incense made of natural ingredients, sandalwood, something like that. We don't need anything else. Maybe we need a bell, even a mini bell. Every summer I used to teach the children how to invite the bell. I think each family should have a bell, even a small one. Everyone in the house should be able to practice inviting the bell to sound, because the bell is considered to be the voice of the Buddha calling us to our true home, to smile and to touch the peace and the flower-ness in us. Please, all Dharma teachers and all the brothers and sisters, teach your children how to invite the bell.

You'll get much better just after breathing in and breathing out with the sound of the bell. When you invite the bell to sound you listen to it like you would listen to the person you love the most. And you practice breathing deeply, calming yourself and smiling. I'm certain that after three in-breaths and out-breaths like that you'll feel much better. Every time you get angry, you know, according to the practice you should not say anything. You should not do anything, everything you say, everything you do when you are angry may cause damage. The best way is to think of the room of peace and you start turning toward the direction of the room of peace and you practice walking meditation slowly to that room. Your mother looks at you and she knows what you are doing. You are practicing to take good care of your anger. She admires you for doing so. You are still young, but you know how to handle your anger.

In school they might teach you everything except how to take care of your anger. When you go to a retreat you have to learn these kinds of things. You make it into a habit every time you get angry, even with yourself. Then you have to turn to the direction of the peace room, the breathing room, and you go slowly in that direction in the style of walking meditation: "Breathing in I calm myself, breathing out I smile to myself." That is very kind of you to smile to yourself, because you are suffering. When you suffer you need love, and you are the one who can offer love to yourself first. Don't wait for another person. When you arrive at the door of the breathing room, you bow, because, that is the kingdom of peace. You go into your own heart. It is a room, but it is also a domain of your heart. Turn it slowly, open it, go into it with walking meditation. When you see your cushion, you bow to it and you sit down.

After you sit down, you may like to light a stick of incense, but if you are not in the mood to light incense, then you may bow to the little bell, pick up the little bell and hold it on your hand like this. You look at it. This is a baby Buddha, a baby Bodhisattva that could help me to go back to myself. And you breathe in and out three times. If you remember the gatha, that's wonderful. But if you don't remember the gatha, it's okay with just breathing in and breathing out: "Body, speech and mind in perfect oneness, I send my heart along with the sound of this bell, may the hearers awaken from forgetfulness, and transcend the heart of anxiety and sorrow."

You have to practice in your own language. You've got to have an Italian translation if you are an Italian boy or girl. If you are Dutch, then you should have a gatha in Dutch. It's nice to practice. You can even put it into music. And you can meditate in music. Why not? In Vietnamese we chant it in music. When we finish chanting it, either in silence or with the words, we feel much better already.

Now we touch the bell with the inviter. We don't call it a stick. Bell inviter. We say "invite the bell to sound." We don't say "hit the bell." We want to be kind. This is the act of waking up the bell. You do not want to do violence to the bell. You announce to the bell that you are going to invite it strongly, so that everyone can hear--this is waking the bell up. The waking up sound is made by touching the bell inviter to the bell. But instead of removing it you just keep it there, so that the sound is only a half sound. Everyone in the community and everyone in the house knows that a really loud sound will be heard, so there is no surprise. Everyone has the chance to prepare himself or herself for the call of the Buddha. The Buddha is going to call you. So you already practice breathing in, while waiting for the real sound, and then the real sound comes.

[Bell]

That is the voice of the Buddha inside you calling you back to your true home, the home of peace, the home of tolerance, the home of love. When you hear the sound, you practice breathing in and out according to another gatha. Of course you know by heart: "Breathing in I calm myself, breathing out I smile." But the other gatha is "Listen, listen; this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home." You say "Listen, listen;" it means I listen, I listen, that's when you breathe in, and when you breathe out, you smile and you say "this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home." This is the voice of the Buddha inside. If you do that three times, you feel much better. Peace has become something real. You don't suffer like a few minutes before. And you know something? Your mommy hears it. She is not in the room but she hears it. She is very proud of her child who tries hard to take care of his or her anger. The next time when she gets angry, I'm sure that she will do like you. Instead of shouting, she will go to the breathing room, she will practice like you.

Only one person practices, but the practice benefit all the other people. Your daddy may be angry, but at the sound of the bell he may be released from his anger. All his children are practicing peace, practicing taking good care of their anger. So when the atmosphere of the family has become difficult for you to breathe, you should not stay there and bear. Because when mommy and daddy get angry with each other there is something like a storm hanging in the air and that is not healthy for the children, because the heavy atmosphere penetrates into the child. It's not healthy for the child and the child has no escape.

In the old times our home was surrounded by a big garden, and every time the child happened to be in an atmosphere of tension, he could always run out and play with the lake, the pond, the dragonfly, the butterfly, or he might go to an uncle, or an aunt, or a cousin. But now we live in a very small apartment house, no uncle, no aunt, no cousin, no lotus pond, no coconut tree, nothing, only cars below, a lot of noise, a lot of dust. The child has no escape. Sometimes the child takes refuge in the bathroom. She suffers so much, she locks the bathroom from inside and her parents do not know that their child suffers so terribly in the bathroom. But you are not safe, entirely safe, in the bathroom because the sound and the atmosphere of tension breaks through the door and comes in. It continues to afflict you. So it is very hard for children in our days. Therefore the breathing room, the room of peace, is a solution for the twenty-first century. Please, you who are architects, who sit there, listen to us. Design us a home where we have a territory of peace, where we can have an island of peace in the midst of the ocean of turbulence. Design us the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, the Pure Land in our modern home, please. You who are artists, help us to decorate that room, to arrange that room so that we will have a chance, we will have an escape.

While you are practicing breathing, and touching peace, and restoring peace, your mother may be interested in doing the same. My child is practicing alone. I should go there and support him. Very kind of her. So instead of cutting carrots, she says, "Well, I can cut my carrot later on. I should join my child now." So she puts down the knife, she goes slowly in the direction of the peace room and she practices walking meditation, and suddenly you hear the sound of the door. You guess that your mommy is coming to join you. And you feel happy. It is very nice to be practicing with a Dharma sister who is your mother. Then you feel that she has come and she sits down just behind you and she practices breathing in and out. Now you feel supported. I think that this is one of the most beautiful things you can see in life, mother and son or daughter sitting quietly in the lotus position and practicing breathing in and out to restore peace. If you are a painter, please draw us that painting. If you are a musician, then write a piece of music on that.

And daddy, what is he thinking, sitting alone outside? I think his love for you and for your mommy is always there. Sometimes it is covered up by some irritation, but the love is still there intact. Your practice of breathing and taking good care of your irritation, anger, will move him. It would be no surprise if he will join you later on. Happiness is something possible. You don't have to go to the supermarket and buy anything at all. Suddenly happiness comes down to your family. That is one idea concerning our home for the twenty-first century. And the children please have a Dharma discussion today. Find out what you like about the breathing room, the peace room in the house -- the embassy of the Buddha in your own home.

Another idea concerning the home of the twenty-first century is a garden where there is a path for walking meditation. Because walking meditation can release a lot of tension, can help you to touch the beauty of life, of nature. That garden may be a collective garden of a group of houses. That garden should be designed in such a way that it expresses love and compassion and harmony. The garden should present nature, real nature, not artificial. No chemicals, no insecticides, should be used in that garden. You should not use the kind of weed killer that destroy the soil. You should use only organic means to build up that beautiful garden. You must respect the right of living beings to cohabit with us in the garden. We should be able to meet the snail in the garden.

If the lotus flower in the garden is covered by many small living beings and cannot flower, then you should not use violent insecticides. Maybe you should try garlic or onion. You crush pieces of garlic and onion and you mix up with some water and you spray. And these small living beings will go to another place to be and leave your lotus flower to bloom. How do you do it in the Upper Hamlet? I have seen two tiny flowers, lotus flowers covered with so many tiny living beings. I know that you don't have the idea of killing them, but we should try means like that. I learned that if you cultivate vegetables together with garlic or onion then you can keep these insects away. There are many nonviolent ways of growing a garden. You who are experts on organic gardening, you have to tell us how to build up such a garden. Such a garden is the garden of Eden. It is a real place for children and adults at the same time. If you cannot afford to have a private garden at home then you should arrange it so that a complex of houses enjoys a collective garden, where people collectively take good care of the garden and practice love and kindness, harmony and cohabitation with other living beings.

[Bell]

Young people, as soon as you have built your home in the twenty-first century please don't forget to invite me. I will be very glad to come to be in your garden, and to sit in your peace room, and breathe in and out with you, and I promise that I will bring along my teapot and prepare tea for you. When you hear the little bell, stand up and bow to the Sangha.

[Bell]

Yesterday during the question and answer time I was able to talk to you about how to take care of our sorrow, our sickness. You need to organize Dharma discussions in small groups to deepen our understanding of how to practice it. Instead of fighting our pain, our anger, our depression, we try to take good care of it — the way a mother would take care of her child.

Today, I would like to offer you another way of taking care of your pain. How to bear your pain easily. How to live with your pain. How to accept it with suffering so much. It's fine if you can transform it, but while it is still there, there are ways that you can live in peace with it. The Buddhist teaching on this is very clear, very concrete. It has to do with the teaching of love. We have to practice love directed to our own self, body and mind. We should learn how to love, and first to love our self. Love is not just the will to love. Love is the capacity of reducing the pain and offering the peace and the happiness. All these are practice. And you can practice.

In the teaching of the Buddha we speak of getting to the other shore, *paramita*. *Paramita* means from this shore you go to the other shore. From the shore of suffering you cross the river to go to the shore of emancipation, of non-suffering. How long does it take for you to come from this shore to the other shore? Sometimes you can do it very quickly. If you have an irritation, you are on this shore. If you know how to take good care of your irritation it will be transformed in just a few minutes, and suddenly you are on the other shore. Please do not think that Bodhisattvas or Buddhas alone can go to the other shore. You, you can do that, too. Several times a day. Every time you are subject, you are the victim of an affliction, like anger, hatred, fear, irritation, you can always practice crossing the river to go to the other shore. The Buddha said if you want to go to the other shore, don't just stay here and pray. "Please, the other shore come here so that I can step on you." The Buddha said you should not do like

that. You can go to the other shore only by crossing, either you use a ferryboat or you swim. You cannot pray for the other shore to come. And the ferryboat is the Dharma. The Buddha always said "My teaching is a raft for you to cross the river of suffering. Use it as a raft and not as something you carry on your head." So as a good practitioner you should get the raft, the ferry boat, in order to be able to cross the river of suffering by ourselves. We should learn the way, the Dharma.

The method I'm going to present to you is called the practice of the immeasurable mind. A mind that can be measured is not a very big mind. A heart that can be measured is not a large heart. That is why you have to practice the un-measurable heart, which is a very important teaching of the Buddha. There are four elements that make up true love. It is *maitri*, translated as loving kindness, *karuna*, translated as compassion, *Mudita*, translated as joy, and *upeksha*, translated as equanimity, nondiscrimination. We practice so that these elements of true love will make our heart into something un-measurable. This is something we practice in our daily life. As our heart begins to expand, to grow large, we are able to contain, to bear, any kind of suffering. It may be that we don't suffer at all, even if we embrace the suffering within us.

In the six *paramitas*, the six boats crossing the ocean of suffering, we have the boat of charity, meaning forbearance. Forbearance is the capacity to embrace difficulties, to embrace the pain, and not suffer. If your heart is large, you can embrace any amount of pain and yet you don't suffer. That is one of six boats carrying us to the other shore.

Forbearance does not mean that you try to suppress the pain. The Chinese way of writing is this: this is the heart and this is a kind of sharp knife that can cause the pain. The heart is so big that even if the knife is there it does not affect it, and finally the knife is transformed into a non-knife element. The Buddha used a very wonderful image, and he used it several times in his lifetime of teaching. He said suppose you have something dirty, if you pour it into your water container then that water you cannot drink. No one can drink such water. If you pour urine, some excrement, or something you spit out from your stomach, then you can't use the whole container of water; you have to throw it away. Even a tiny bit of dirt falling into your glass, you cannot drink it. But if you throw that container of dirt into a large river. If you throw the dirt, maybe one-kilo, or ten kilos, into an immense river, people in the whole area can still drink water from the river. That's because the river is big, and it takes no time at all for the river to transform the dirt. Overnight the dirt will not be there, because a huge amount of water is circulating. The whole amount of mud underneath will be able to transform the dirt you threw yesterday and the river becomes limpid, entirely ready for you to drink.

The difference is not whether or not you throw the dirt in. You throw the dirt, the dirt is real, existent. But if your container is small, then the whole thing has to be thrown away. But if it is a big container, it is a big river, then it can embrace the dirt very easily and it will transform the dirt very quickly, just overnight. Your heart, also, if your heart is small, then you cannot bear the amount of pain and suffering inflicted on you by society, by another person. But if your heart is large, you can very well live with it. You can embrace it, and you don't have to suffer. So the practice of the four immeasurable minds is to blow up your heart until it becomes a big river. And the way of making your heart big is to use the instruments of *maitri*, *karuna*, *Mudita*, and *upeksha*. The essence of it is the practice of meditation, of looking deeply.

Yesterday we spoke about salvation by insight. You can only be saved; you can only be liberated by your insight. And how could insight come? You have to practice concentration. You have to practice looking deeply, and as you continue to practice looking deeply, the insight will come and liberate you from your suffering.

Mencius was a Chinese philosopher, very well known. He lost his father when he was very young, and his mother had to move into a poor quarter of the city to make a living. She stayed up very late in the night to do the work of weaving. One day the little boy came home very dirty, with his clothes all torn. He just had a fight with the children in the neighborhood. He became something like a delinquent child. She got angry, because she had great expectations of her little boy. She was doing the work of weaving. She stopped and she was about to punish him, to shout at him. Suddenly she stopped, because insight came to her. She was able to see that in the neighborhood there was no school. There was only a slaughterhouse. The children didn't go to school. They spent time playing on the road and playing games like slaughtering a pig or a calf. If the adults do things, then the children imitate. They would use a raw sweet potato to represent a cow, they used four incense sticks for legs of the cow, and they gathered and performed the killing. They imitated adults. And of course they would fight each other and say rough words to each other. That is the environment in which the mother of the boy had put him. On the verge of shouting at him, the mother realized that it's her fault. Any child put into that environment will become the same. So she did

not do anything and she was not angry anymore. That is salvation by insight.

Instead she stayed up later into the night, worked harder and saved money. She had an intention to move to another quarter of the city. Three months later she was able to move to a better neighborhood, where there was a school, where the children were clean and polite. She did not have to punish the child, to shout at him, to suffer. The boy after that became a very intelligent, hard-working student, and finally became a very famous philosopher.

You don't have to suffer if you have insight -- if you understand and that understanding is the fruit of deep looking. If we suffer so much, it is because we are ignorant. If we get angry at our father, at our mother, our son, our daughter, or our partner, it is because we are still ignorant. Practice in looking deeply will allow you to see how the other person has become like that. He was not like that when you married him, but now he is like this, like this, very hard to be with. And who is responsible? Put the questions in front of you and meditate. When I first married him, he was not like that. When I first married her, she was not like that. Why has she become so unbearable today? Who is responsible? Should I blame her, or should I blame myself, or should I blame society? All these questions help with our meditation. To meditate means to confront reality and not to escape. If you are running away from your real problems, you are not meditating correctly. You need to sit in a mound of calm, of concentration. You need to sit in a mound of mindfulness in order to confront these hardships and to look into the nature of this suffering.

[Bell]

If your father considers you to be his property, like a house or a sum of money or a car; if he considers you something like one of his belongings, he thinks he can do anything with you because you are his child, his son or his daughter. He does not know that you are a person, a human being, with the right to think and to act and to follow what you believe to be beautiful, good, and true. He only wants you to follow the path he has traced for you. You have to ask why? Why is your father like that, because around us there are fathers who are different? There are fathers who are capable of treating their sons and their daughters as free-living beings with a lot of respect. I have a practice and I treat my students with respect, even if they are very small, because I have the insight that only by treating them like that could the best thing in them come out. And that's not only for their sake, but my sake, and the sake of many people, many living beings. Because I know how to treat my students like that I have been able to bring out so many talents that are buried in each of them. If you ask why I can do like that, it's because I have been lucky. I have had the teacher. I have had Dharma brothers, and sisters. I have learned the Dharma, so the Buddha has opened my eyes. I'm liberated from my narrowness, my prejudices.

If your father has not been able to be like that because he was just unlucky, if you blame him, if you want to punish him, he will suffer more, that's all. You cannot help him. Only when you say "Daddy, I understand you, why you are like that. I would prefer that you are not like that, but what can I do? Your education was like that. Your environment was like that. You were not in touch with the kind of teaching or insight that has a liberating nature." You don't say it, but you tell yourself about it. Suddenly, your hatred, your anger toward your father just vanishes. Your father becomes someone who needs your help, your love, rather than your punishment. Running away from your father is a way to punish him. You want him to suffer. That is why you run away from him. Even if you kill yourself, it is with the intention to make him suffer. You say, "You see, I killed myself because of you. I want you to suffer because you have treated me like an animal, like a possession of yours." So even if you kill yourself, if you run away from home, that is not inflicting the suffering on yourself, but the will to harm, the will to make suffer the person you think to be the cause of your suffering.

Between parents and children there is a fight. If you don't practice, if you are not wise, if the elements of *maitri*, *karuna*, *Mudita*, and *upeksha* are not there in our love, then we create hell for each other. Always in the fight between parents and children, it is the children who are the losers, because children are not supposed to speak back with the terms used by parents. The parents may beat their children, but the children cannot beat their parents. The parents can abuse their children with words, but children cannot do that. Because they cannot express the violence they have received, that is why they get sick. The violence they receive stays within them and seeks the way to go out, to get expressed. If the young person hangs himself, or shoots himself, that is, he wants to express his anger, his frustration, his violence, there is no other way out. So if you inflict something on yourself, it is because you have no other ways of expressing the violence in you, the hatred, and the anger in you. You are the victim of the violence you have received from your parents and from society.

Poor young child. She did not have any means to protect herself, to protect himself. The parents are not wise

enough not to pour their violence on the children, even if they intend to love them and make them happy. I know of a young man, who reacted to his father, who is a medical doctor. The medical doctor had been my student when he was studying medicine. He sounds like a young man of the new generation. He promised to himself that he would be the kind of father who would be different from his father. But when he became a father, he did exactly the same thing as the father had done to him. You hate your father. You promised that when you grow up you will not be like your father. You will do the opposite of your father. Yet, when you grow up you get married, you have children, you do exactly like him. That is the wheel of *samsara*. To practice is to cut through the wheel of *samsara*. You don't allow it to continue, with you and with your children.

So, in the light of this practice, both generations must make an effort. We should recognize the violence in us. The kind of violence that is destroying us, and destroying the person we love. All intentions, even all intentions to love and to make that person happy, make him, make her, suffer.

So how to help the parents handle the violence, their suffering, so that they will not pour it on their children? How to help the children, how to take care of their violence, how to transform it, not to hate their parents? Both parties have to seek the path of deep looking because both generations are just victims. The children think they are victims of their parents, and the parents think they are victims of the children. Children of other families find out they are not like my children, so we continue to blame each other. We don't accept the fact that violence is inside of both of us. Instead of fighting each other, we should come together and find a way out, between parents and children, between partner and partner. It is not because we have suffered that we have to make each other continue to suffer. We suffer very much because of the same reason. Therefore we should be allies for each other rather than enemies. The amount of suffering in us is enough to instruct us how to not make the same mistake. The Buddha said, "What has come to be, you should practice looking deeply into its nature." Once you begin to understand its nature, how it has come to be, then you are already on a path of liberation.

So partner has to come to partner and agreed on the fact that both of us have suffered. Both of us have violence, hatred, and afflictions in us. Instead of opposing each other, blaming each other, we should help each other, practicing together, and you do that in the context of a Sangha, with the help of a teacher, or many teachers, many brothers, sisters in the Dharma. Because everyone has practice, everyone can try and help bring light into your suffering and help you to practice. In the beginning, walking is difficult, but walking with a few friends in the Dharma, make it easier. In the beginning breathing is not natural, it is something like forcing you to do things that are not natural. But finally with the support of brothers and sisters in the Dharma, you find breathing is wonderful, natural, calming, refreshing, transforming.

We feel that we are victim of injustice. Most of us, not to say all of us, feel somehow we are the victims of many forms of injustice, coming from parents, from ancestors, from nature, from society. We feel that no one understands us. It's very hard for us to accept what has come to us. Suffering is there, real. The Buddha said the first truth, the first of the four noble truths, is the presence of suffering, the existence of suffering, *dukkha*.

A two-year-old child, struck with hate, a child born crippled, you cannot bear it, you blame God. If God exists, how could God allow such a thing to happen? You are very young suddenly you have cancer. You cannot believe it. Have you done anything to deserve that? If you cannot blame your parents, then you blame society, and if you don't find someone to blame, you look up and you blame God. The feeling of being a victim of injustice is always there in every one of us. We are mistreated, and the more we feel that injustice in us, the more we suffer. The only way is to meditate, to understand.

Yesterday, I talked about the young person who is so angry with his father and who made that declaration. The young man said, "I don't want to have anything to do with my father." We understand. The young man was so angry. He felt that all his suffering has come from his father. He wants to be entirely other than his father. He doesn't want to hear anything about his father, to see anything about his father. He wants to be completely cut off from that part of existence. But if he practices looking deeply, he will see that he is only his father. He is only the continuation of his father, even if he hates his father with his whole being. Hating his father is hating himself. That is something we get when we practice looking deeply. There is no alternative, except accepting your father, embrace your father. If your heart is small, you cannot embrace him, you've got to have a big heart. How to make your heart big, so that there is enough room to embrace your father?

The practice of looking deeply is the only practice that helps your heart to expand, the un-measurable mind, the un-measurable heart. When you look deeply, you begin to understand why your father is like that, why you are like

that. You see that both you and your father are victims. If you put yourself into the situation of your father, you would do exactly the same thing as he has done. Just looking around you see that. Many young men hate their fathers, promise that they will do exactly the opposite, but they have done exactly the things that their fathers have done: samsara. So with that kind of insight you can no longer be angry. Insight helps your heart to expand, and suddenly you have plenty of place and your father can be embraced in yourself. Love become possible -- hatred, anger, just transforms into love. What a miracle. It is *vipassana*, the practice of looking deeply that can perform that miracle. Salvation by insight, by understanding.

You blame your sickness; you complain that you are sick, you are ill. You think that it is very difficult to bear your illness. It makes you suffer so much. Even if it is physical pain, if you know how to practice making your heart grow big, then you have the capacity of accepting the physical pain very easily. You fancy that if you pray to God, if you pray to Avalokiteshvara, if you've got a talented doctor, then you will have perfect health. And usually we enjoy perfect health. But the idea of perfect health is just the outcome of ignorance. There is no such a thing as perfect health. If you are still alive, that is because during your childhood you were ill a lot, got sick a lot, and by getting sick like that you developed the immune system, because the fungi, bacteria, the viruses are always there, ready to attack. You can die very easily because of them. You have survived, because during your childhood you were very often sick, and during the time of sickness you had an opportunity to learn how to release the antibodies in you that were developed. So thanks to that time of illness, that happened during your childhood, you are still alive today. So if you have some kind of illness today, you have to practice looking deeply in order to accept it and live in peace with it.

There are four basic diseases with which all of us are struck, whether we want them or not. The first disease is death. I carry that disease in me, you also, death, you have to die someday. The Buddha reminds us to practice the five awareness's. I am of the nature to die. I cannot escape dying. Death is a disease that strikes everyone and you carry it with you. You may say, "I have cancer. I will die in three months. You don't have cancer. You don't have to die." That's not correct. We may die a little bit after you, but we will have to die. And it is not sure that we will die after you. You have cancer, but maybe you live longer. Impermanence, who knows. So every one of us is struck by that basic disease, death.

The second disease is old age. All of us bear the disease carry the disease inside. The Buddha said, "I am the nature to grow old, I cannot escape old age." The third disease is sickness. I am of the nature to get sick; I cannot be free from sickness. So it is better to learn to accept sickness then to fight. The more you fight, the more you suffer.

Then, I am of the nature to be born again. It is a horrible thing to be born again to many people, because throughout their life they have suffered so much that they wish they will never be reborn. Sometimes we celebrate our birthday, but there are those that are very afraid of being born again. Do you want to live forever? Can you bear the thought that you have to live forever? It's very frightening if you are not allowed to die. Sometimes we are so tired, sometimes we suffer so much, that we think that to die is the only way to liberate us. Sometimes we suffer because of illness. We cannot eat by ourselves, we cannot walk and many people have to attend to us. We are completely useless in this life and yet we are condemned to live forever. If someone comes and says, "If you want to live, to live forever, you will get it, sign here." I think you will be frightened. That is a kind of sentence, most frightening. You are struck by the disease of being born. Because being born means you have to go through again. You will have to go through again what you have been through. After you die, you will be reborn in order to do the same. Very frightening.

But these four diseases, birth, old age, sickness, and death can be overcome, just by the practice of looking deeply. The scripture called the Heart Sutra is an instrument for you to practice. If you practice, if you have the luxury of practicing the Heart Sutra, then one day you will be able to touch the world of no birth and no death. "Listen Shariputra, things are in themselves empty, nothing is created, nothing dies. There is no coming, no going, no being, no non-being." That is the finger pointing to the world, to the world of no birth and no death. If you know how to practice touching the world of no birth, no death, then you overcome the fear of these four diseases, birth, sickness, old age, death. Your heart, your understanding, becomes so immense, that looking at the so-called birth, death, disease, old age, you just smile. You are not afraid at all.

Suppose there is a wave, a wave that is living its life as a wave. There is one moment when the wave is born, there is one moment when the wave reaches its highest peak, there is one moment when the wave begins to go down, and there is one moment when the wave disappears on the surface of the ocean. The wave is so busy, paying attention to outer appearances; the wave has never been able to touch its true essence that is water. Yes, concerning



a wave there is birth, death, high, low, more beautiful, less beautiful. But concerning water, there is no birth, no death, no high, no low, no being, no non-being. If the wave is able to touch its nature as water, it will overcome all fear, all suffering, caused by the idea of birth, death, high, low, ugly, beautiful.

The only way is to practice looking deeply, to have insight. Therefore the suffering, even if it is there, whether coming from society, coming from parents, coming from children, coming from friends, coming from war, from sickness, if you get the knowledge, if you get the insight, if your heart becomes immeasurable, if you can touch the true nature of no birth and no death, you can very easily embrace all these kinds of suffering. And you don't have to suffer. That is the teaching of *shanti paramita*.

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# Protecting Our Children

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Good morning dear friends. Today is the 7th of August, 1998. We are in the New Hamlet, and today we are going to speak French. That's good, isn't it?

You know well that the Buddha is not God; the Buddha is a human being like all of us. He suffered a lot. He practiced, and he overcame his suffering and his difficulties, in order to become a wonderful being who was very calm, very compassionate, very understanding; and he had much happiness. He showed us the way. The Buddha is our teacher, our master, our spiritual father, our brother, and it is absolutely possible to hold the hand of the Buddha while we walk. Every day when I walk I hold the hand of the Buddha. This is something very pleasant to do.

Remember that the Buddha is not God, the Buddha is a human being like all of us. The Buddha had many friends and many teachers. In a previous life the Buddha had been a disciple of a master called *Dipankara*. *Dipankara* is a Pali word, meaning he or she who lights the lamp. The world needs light, and we need men and women who are able to light up the lamps, to bring into this world the light of freedom, the light of understanding, the light of love. Buddha *Dipankara* is someone who is able to light up the lamp in order to shine light on the way the world is. In that time the Buddha was a student. He was following higher studies in letters, and his dream was to become a statesman, like the Minister of Internal Affairs, or the Minister of Foreign Affairs, or the Prime Minister. That was his dream. In that time the Buddha, Shakyamuni, was called bodhisattva, because he wasn't yet Buddha. The bodhisattva was a student, and his dream was to become a statesman.

All the young people of his time had the same dream: to study, to do research, in order to pass the exams and to be chosen by the king to become a statesman. At that time the parents and friends did everything they could to help students to pass the exams. Every three years there were examinations, and, if you passed the exams well, you could be chosen, to be a statesman. In each province there was a competition organized, and young people like the bodhisattva, were asked to come to the competition. There were thousands of people who were admitted to the competition, but only a hundred could be chosen as statesmen. After they were chosen, all of them were sent to the capital, so the king could make another selection, and this was called the Imperial Competition. The subject of the dissertation was prepared by the king himself. He would ask them ten or fifteen questions, to find out if the candidates were able to understand the situation of the country, of the society, and if they had any ways to help the people and the society to develop and be happier.

So the young man offered himself in the competition, but he wasn't chosen. It was with a lot of despair that he left the competition. He had studied a lot, and his dream was to be selected so he could become a statesman, and then he could have a family, become rich and famous, and be able to help his people and his land. But he suffered despair after the competition because he hadn't been chosen, and he went back to his homeland very exhausted. He had to walk for hours and hours across the mountains, through the forests, and over the countryside.

One afternoon he was going past a hill, completely exhausted, and he was hungry. He couldn't go on. Just then he met a hermit, a monk who lived very simply at the foot of a hill. He stopped, and he noticed that the hermit was cooking something in his little pot. He was hungry, he was so tired, he was exhausted, and the worst thing was that despair was ruling his heart. He stopped, and he asked for something to eat, and the hermit said, "Rest a little bit, and when I have finished cooking this soup, I will give you a bowl. But the soup is not cooked, so please lie down. There are the roots of a tree, you can use them as your pillow, and you can rest for the moment, while I finish cooking this soup." The soup which the hermit was making was a millet soup. I don't know if you know of a kind of cereal which is called millet. This was called "golden millet," and it was very good. My mother often made millet soup for me and I like it very much.

The young man lay down, and began to rest. All of a sudden he fell into a deep dream. A very strange dream. In the dream, he saw that he had been chosen in the triennial competition, and he had been first out of a hundred young people who had been chosen. After that he had been sent to the capital in order to take part in the Imperial competition. He did his very best to answer the questions asked by the Emperor. He used all of his intelligence and all the knowledge he had acquired through his reading of many, many volumes of books. Then, he was chosen by the Emperor, and since he was considered the most brilliant of all the young people who had presented themselves at the competition, the Emperor offered him the hand of the Princess. The Princess was very beautiful, and you cannot imagine how happy he was. He was full of hope, full of energy, he had been very fortunate.

He was given a very important post in the cabinet: he was made the Minister of Defense. His land was very small, situated next to a very strong country, and this strong country would often send troops to invade the little country. Therefore, the Emperor made him the Minister of Defense, so he could prepare the land to fight against the invading forces from the neighboring country. He went through many difficulties, many sufferings. There was jealousy, there was despair, there was anger, and his relationship with his wife, the Princess, was not easy. They had arguments nearly every day. They had two children, and the children were very difficult to bring up. So there was a lot of unhappiness, a lot of difficulties in his married life, and also in his social and political life. Then suddenly, he learned that the invading forces of the neighboring country were getting ready to come and invade the country. So he had to call all of his troops together, and send to them to the frontier to resist this military invasion from the next country.

This Minister of Defense was not happy, and therefore his relationships with his wife and his children were not good. He didn't have enough peace and intelligence and clarity in his heart, and so, when he organized the resistance against the enemy, he made a lot of mistakes. The result was that the enemy army was able to invade his country, and take a lot of territory. The news of the defeat was brought to the Emperor, and he was furious with the Minister of Defense. He designated someone else to be in charge of the national defense, and he gave orders for the old Minister of Defense to be beheaded.

In the dream the young man saw himself taken to the execution block, surrounded by soldiers, to be beheaded in a military ceremony. At the moment when he was about to be beheaded, he heard something like the song of a bird, and he woke up. He came out of his dream, and he didn't know where he was. When he looked to the left and the right, he saw that he was at the foot of a hill, and near him was a hermit who was stirring some millet soup in a little pot. It seemed that the dream had not lasted very long, maybe fifteen minutes, but during that time a whole lifetime had passed. I think that the hermit helped this dream to come into the head of the young man, to help him learn something: a whole life had passed in a dream, and it wasn't fifteen minutes at all. When he looked at the hermit, the hermit looked at him with a beautiful smile, and said, "Did you have a good rest? Now the soup is ready. Sit down next to me, I'm going to give you a bowl of this good soup." The young man stood up, and he was no longer hungry. He had seen so much in his dream!

Each life can be a dream, and if you do not know how to live each moment of your life deeply, your life will pass like a dream, very quickly, maybe even more quickly than fifteen minutes. The hermit was there, calm and serene, and he was using a chopstick to stir the millet soup. Looking deeply at the hermit you could see that peace was alive in him. He was really alive, he was really happy. With peace, with solidity and freedom, life is something wonderful, and happiness is possible. The young man was sitting near the hermit, and he asked him questions about the practice. Since he was intelligent, he began to discover that peace in the heart, that liberty and freedom in the heart, are very basic for a happy life. Therefore, he gave up his ambitions to be a statesman. He gave up his dreams. He wanted to learn to live like the hermit, in order to be able to transform his suffering and to bring peace and freedom back into his heart. He decided to become a disciple of the hermit.

This hermit was the Buddha *Dipankara*, the one who lights the lamp. And afterwards, the young man, when he had practiced through many lifetimes, became a Buddha with the name Shakyamuni. He is our teacher, he is our spiritual father, he is our grandfather, and he is a person with whom we can walk everyday when we do walking meditation. Therefore, if you are a student in the university, think about this. Look deeply into your ambitions, into your plans, to see if it's worth spending all your life and your energy to acquire these objects of your desire. Would it be wiser to look deeply, in order to be able to see that without inner freedom, without solidity, without peace, no happiness will be possible?

To be in touch with someone, a friend, who knows the path of freedom, who knows the path of the practice of solidity and compassion, is something very necessary. The Buddha *Dipankara* is always there, always near you. If you are attentive, you will recognize him. There is a very

important word in Buddhism: it is *kalyanamitra*. It means a friend who is wise, a friend who has light. This friend can be very close to you, but because you are not mindful enough you have not been able to recognize his presence near you. Buddha Dipankara is there, with his freedom, with his understanding, with his power of shining light. He is the lighter of the lamp for society. You should recognize him and become close to him. You should see him as your closest friend, in order to be able to become what the Buddha Shakyamuni was able to become. This is the theme of my talk: the friend of your life, your lifetime friend, the friend who can uphold you, who can give you light, so that you do not lose your way on paths full of darkness. There are so many young people who are wandering in darkness: alcohol, drugs, and destruction of the body and the mind by an irresponsible way of life. All of this represents the darkness, and too many young people suffer in our society. Therefore we need a great deal of light. But Buddha Dipankara, the person who lights up the lamps in order to bring us light in the world, is always there, near us. We have to look. The moment when you find that spiritual friend is a wonderful moment, and you need to write to me and tell me that you have met the Buddha Dipankara when you meet him or her.

The little bell will be invited, you will stand up and bow to the Sangha, and then you can go out and continue to discuss the Dharma.

(Bell)

My dear friends, I think that we need to set up an alliance between parents and teachers to protect our children. The environment in which our children live does not have enough safety. There are too many negative things in this environment, and the children are exposed to too many dangers. We need to do something to protect the children, day and night, against the aggressions of society. We have organized our society in such a way that we produce many young people who are uprooted from society, from their spiritual traditions, from their families. We have been through times when we have seen the family broken into pieces, and churches which are empty of young people. The spiritual and moral leaders are not able to inspire people, above all the younger generation. There have been times when, and it is true now, when people do not want to listen to the sound of the bell of the church. In the United States, churches no longer ring their bells, and monks no longer wear their habits when they go outside the monastery. Religion has lost its prestige, it's lost the confidence of people, and so has the family. The family is being broken up. There is no longer any happiness, any harmony in the family. The children born into families like that, growing up in families like that, no longer have confidence in family life; and they no longer have confidence in society or in the church. We have produced generations and generations of young people who can be described as hungry ghosts: hungry for love, for understanding. They can no longer find values to accept and live with.

In my own country we have a tradition of offering food to the hungry ghosts. Once a year, on the full moon day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar—that is the next full moon as far as our calendar here is concerned—each house in our country has an ancestral altar. You have children in the house, but you also have your ancestors in your house. And the practice is to put yourself in contact with your ancestors every day, and also to be in contact with your children every day. This is a very important practice for us in Southeast Asia. When the Catholic missionaries came to Southeast Asia, they told us to abandon this ancestor worship and become Christians. I'm sure that in Christianity there are many things that we can learn and bring into our spiritual lives, but to advise us to abandon our practice of being in touch with our ancestors was something very negative. Every day someone in the family has to dust the altar of the ancestors, change the water in the flower vase, light a stick of incense and come back to oneself before the altar for one or two minutes. It is our daily practice in Vietnam, and every family does this.

The children see their father practicing like this, and they see their mother or their elder sister practicing like this, and they learn how to do the same things: how to dust, how to light incense on the altar. This is a time to be in touch with your roots. If you are uprooted, you cannot be a happy person; therefore you have to keep in touch with your ancestors. They are always there in the family, and in our tradition, everything that happens, every special event in the family, has to be announced to the ancestors. If you are about to send your son to the university, you prepare a little offering to the ancestors, light incense, and tell the ancestors, "A week from now we are going to send this young man to the university." This is not superstition. It is communication with our ancestors, our own source.

The ancestral altar is a symbol. The ancestors are not on the altar, they are in you. But when you look at the altar, you touch the essence of your ancestors in you, and that is the essence of the practice. Even if you are very poor, even if you do not have enough to eat, you will always have an altar for the ancestors in your house, and the altar is always put in the central place in the house. If someone in the family is very sick, you must tell the ancestors, and ask the ancestors to send their support to the one who is sick. Your ancestors are in you, the strong cells in your body, and if you can touch your ancestors, especially those ancestors who lived a long life, perhaps ninety years, you are touching the strong cells in you, and those strong cells can help the cells in you which are not strong, to become strong again.

If you have cancer, you know that there are cells in you which are not working as they should. There is a kind of disorder in your body. Maybe your way of life is not healthy, there is too much stress. Being in touch with your grandfather or your grandmother, who is in you, who was in good health, who was able to overcome their physical and psychological difficulties, you activate the strong elements in yourself in order to be able to get better. So to be able to be in touch with ancestors is a wonderful practice. When you do that you receive a great deal of energy, and understanding and wisdom, and also a great deal of love, which has been handed down to you in the form of seeds. In your store consciousness, your ancestors are all there, with their wisdom, their love. So when you touch the ancestral altar, you touch the ancestors in yourself. If you're going to marry your daughter to a young man in the neighboring village, you have to tell the ancestors, so there is a regular and continual contact with the ancestors. This is an essential practice as far as I am concerned, and I have proposed it to our Western friends. It is not superstition.

In Plum Village, in the Lower Hamlet, we always used to make an altar for the spirit of the Earth. In all the houses in Vietnam, there is a little altar to the spirit of the Earth. The Earth protects us, the Earth nourishes us, giving us the food that we need and everything else. Therefore, every time we light incense and come back to ourselves before the altar of the Earth spirit, we make a deep aspiration to protect the Earth, because in protecting the Earth, we protect ourselves. This all comes from the spiritual tradition of Southeast Asia.

If you know how to be in touch with your ancestors, then you know how to be in touch with your children and your grandchildren. It is the same thing. You need time to be with your young people, with your children. Not with incense, but with other things: with your breathing, and by walking in the woods with them. I have suggested that we have a little meditation room in each house to be called the breathing room, and there you can renew yourselves. In daily life we are always losing ourselves: we lose our energy, we lose our calm, we lose our honesty. Therefore we need somewhere to be able to go back to ourselves, to be able to renew ourselves. And we call this place the breathing room or the meditation room. In each house of the next century we want to have this kind of room. We have a room for everything: for guests, for children to play in, to sleep, to receive our guests. We have rooms for all these things, but we do not have rooms to renew ourselves, to take care of our nervous systems. We need a room for our nervous systems, a room where we can make ourselves new, and we can renew the relationships between ourselves and those who live with us. In this room, you can put a little table, with maybe a vase of flowers—or maybe one flower is enough, because this flower symbolizes freshness and beauty and truth. You do not need a statue of the Buddha, but you may need a flower and a few cushions for the different members of your family. Each morning, before leaving the house to go to the office or school, it would be wonderful to sit down together for just one or two minutes. Invite the bell to sound, listen deeply, practice deep listening to the sound of the bell. Touch the depth of your being, touch your spiritual ancestors, and your blood ancestors, and breathe mindfully in and out. This is a wonderful way to begin our day.

Before we have to leave each other, we may say, "Have a good day" to the other person, but this is just a wish. Rather than just wishing that the day will be good, we can make the day good. We can begin our day in such a way that it will be a good day. Sitting on a cushion with your husband or your wife, and with your children, to listen to the bell three times, to breathe deeply at the same time, is a beautiful practice, and it's very easy to do. You will see harmony and unity in the family, and the child who is there will also feel something. This kind of thing will nourish the children, and throughout their lives they will be able to use these practices as a refuge.

Before going to bed, we can do the same thing. Instead of praying, we can practice a little meditation, just for one minute, before wishing "goodnight" to our children. As parents you can sit with your children for one or two minutes. You can say, "Children, it's time to go into the breathing room. Let's sit down and listen to the bell." You turn off the television and go with the children into this little room, which represents peace and calm, and the spirituality of the house. We need a source of spirituality in our houses, and this room represents our spiritual traditions. Therefore we go to this room to sit down peacefully. We go to that room with walking meditation, taking the hand of a child. It is a way of expressing your love, to take the hand of your child, and to go to the breathing room with peace and solidity, and also to give your child peace and happiness. Stay with your child a minute, and listen to the bell. The bell can be invited by the child, and after that the child will go to bed. You will continue what you have to do in the family, and when the time comes for you to go to bed, you will do the same with your husband or wife. These are very simple things to do, but they are very important. It's rather like having an ancestral altar.

We all have ancestors, spiritual and blood ancestors, and we know that someone who is cut off from their roots cannot be happy. Thus, the practice is to be able to put down our roots, re-root ourselves. It's very important to be able to do this. The child needs to go back to his or her roots; how can they do that? Only with you. You need to help the child to go back to his or her roots, organizing your daily family life in such a way that the child can practice rooting himself or herself every day.

Without roots we become hungry ghosts. Look around your. There are so many young people who are completely uprooted from their cultures, their families, and their spiritual traditions. They have nothing to do with them. They are looking for something true and beautiful and good, but they are unable to find these things. In the church they cannot find them, in the family they cannot find them, in society they cannot find them, and they despair. In their anguish, they feel that they feel they cannot go on. They cannot bear this terrible emptiness, since they can find nothing beautiful in the world, nothing true, nothing good. Therefore they despair, and despair is the most terrible poison. Young people have come to this point, this sickness of despair, and therefore they use drugs, or they use music, or they use alcohol, and destroy themselves physically, and mentally.

The government has had to use strong means to stop the importation of drugs, even using the army. They use airplanes and helicopters to mount an attack on those who bring in drugs. But the only way is to see the cause of people wanting to take drugs, which is because of a lack. People feel the need for something to believe in: truth, goodness, beauty, without which life has no meaning. That is why the young people have suffered so much, and many of them have become hungry ghosts. I have met many young people who are hungry ghosts, or wandering spirits. They come to our practice center. You only have to look at them for one or two minutes and you will be able to identify them as hungry ghosts. The way they walk, the way they sit, the way they stand up, proves that they are hungry ghosts. They are hungry for understanding, hungry for love, and wherever they go they are not understood by the church, their families or society.

In my own country, on full moon day of the seventh month, we offer food for the hungry spirits. We can do this in France also, but in a different way. As far as we believe, a hungry ghost has a huge belly, and an esophagus as thin as a needle. We call them *pretas* in Sanskrit. Even if you have food to offer to these hungry ghosts, it is impossible for them to swallow it, because their throats are too small. They cannot swallow, therefore in the ceremony we have to use a mantra which is able to make their throats the usual size, so that they are able to receive food. We make the offering in the garden, in front of the house, because only the ancestors can eat at the ancestral altar, and there isn't enough room there for the hungry ghosts. Therefore a table is set up in the garden in front of the house, and on that table we offer food and drink for the hungry ghosts. And we recite mantras and *dharani*, magic formulas to help hungry ghosts have throats of a normal size, so that they are able to receive food and drink. There are many chants also, and readings from the sutras to help the hungry ghosts to have a deeper understanding of the practice, so that they can transform themselves. This is the living practice in Vietnam.

Now if we look around us we will see that the hungry ghosts are always there, and every day we create more hundreds of thousands of hungry ghosts. The way in which we organize our society produces hundreds of thousands of hungry ghosts every day. I have tried a great deal to help these young people, but it is very difficult, because there is so much suspicion in them. They do not believe us easily. Even if you have something to offer them, it is difficult for them to accept it, because of their suspicion and doubt. We need to be very patient to gain their trust. Before we gain their trust, we cannot do anything to help them. They need understanding, they need love. But even if you have understanding and love, it is difficult to give it to them, because they are suspicious of everything, and they doubt everything. Therefore you need a lot of patience in order to help them. You need to learn how to embrace them with your tolerance, and above all with your patience. One day a little root may emerge, and you'll have hope; your task is to help that person to have roots, to put down their roots again, and you'll do your best to send that person back to their family, their society, and their church.

Understanding is essential. We need to understand why the situation in the family has become what it is; we have to understand why that situation in the church has become what it is. We have to understand why the situation in the society has become what it is. And once we understand that, we can forgive, and we will be able to have enough energy to go back and to do something to renew the institution called family, church or society. The family needs to be restructured. With the practice and mindfulness, you can restructure your family, and you can restructure your church, your society. We need to truly bring about the energy of understanding and compassion in the family, in order to be able to reclaim the young people who have left us. When we practice mindfulness, we can look deeply and try to restructure our families. We act in such a way that understanding and harmony and being in touch are possible every day. Practice in such a way that you can be in touch with your ancestors every day. Practice in such a way that the relationship between you and your children is re-established, and communication is restored.

It is necessary to practice listening deeply, to practice compassionate listening. And practicing loving speech is also necessary. All these things are taught in practice centers. Learn how to listen, to your ancestors, to your children, and your partner. Without doing this, you cannot re-establish communication, and without communication will be lost.

Deep listening means compassionate listening. It is something we have to train ourselves in straight away, because many of us have lost the capacity to listen. There's too much pain and too much irritation in us, and we are not able to listen with patience and compassion. In each of us there is some suffering, there is despair, there is anger and irritation. There are people who are like bombs, ready to explode at any moment, and we are afraid to go near them, we are afraid to talk to them. The slightest mistake will make them explode. When we try to avoid such a person, he thinks we have given up on him or her, he thinks everyone hates him or her. Therefore, at all costs, we should learn how to communicate, and the practice of listening deeply is absolutely necessary.

In Buddhism there is someone called *Avalokiteshvara*. He or she is someone who has wonderful ability to listen with compassion, knowing that the other person suffers so much. We know that they need to express themselves, but nobody in the house dares to listen, because everyone else has their own suffering. When listening to the other person with all your pain, it is possible that you will what you hear will water the seeds of suffering in you, and when those seeds are watered you will have no more patience or ability to listen deeply. Compassionate listening has one aim only, and that is to relieve the suffering of the other person. You need to breathe mindfully in order to nourish your intention to listen. I have no other motivation for listening other than to give the person the opportunity to express themselves. We need to train for a long time in order to be able to do this. Even if the other person accuses you, even if the other person is full of wrong perceptions, even if the other person accuses you quite unjustly, is always reproaching you, you keep your compassion alive, and you are able to stay by them, silently, calmly. Your business is to listen, even if there is no truth, no justice in what they are saying. If you can listen for an hour like that it is already a wonderful help to the other person. You are the best kind of psychotherapist, because you have the capacity to listen with compassion, just to listen. You don't have to say anything. Even if the other person says very foolish things, if all of his perceptions are wrong, even if he or she accuses you, you always follow your breath and keep calm, because you are playing the role of *Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva*, listening in order to relieve the suffering. This is something that anyone can do.

If you practice mindful breathing sitting meditation, walking meditation for a week, you will be able to acquire the capacity to listen deeply to the other person. And with the practice of deep listening goes the practice of loving speech, a kind of speech which is characterized by calmness. You have the right to say everything which is in your heart. You do not need to hide things. You don't need to hide anything. You have the right, even the duty, to tell everything that is in your heart, but you have to say it in a loving way, a calm way. This may not be easy. It takes a lot of concentration.

At first you may have a very strong intention to use only calm words, but when you begin to speak you begin to touch the blocks of suffering within yourself, and you lose yourself. There are vibrations in your voice. The pain begins to manifest itself in your words. You suffer, you become irritable, and your words lose their capacity to communicate. The energy of your pain starts to rise up in you until you can no longer speak with loving speech. In such a case you shouldn't continue. You should say, "My dear one, I do not feel quite right. I promise that we can continue another day." And at that point you retire. You should not try too much. You should stop as soon as you see that you are no longer calm. You have your limits, and you know your limits. Therefore, you have to train more and more, until you can stay for half an hour or an hour, and practice loving speech. You have to communicate to the other in such a way that they can accept what you are saying. Tell them the truth. Tell them what has made you suffer. Do not blame or make any accusations. Just help the other to see what is in your heart: "Darling, I have suffered, and this is my suffering. I just wanted you to know what is happening in me, because I need your help. Without you I cannot do it." At this moment there is a transformation, a healing, and you have to commit yourself in this way so that the other person can sit down and listen to you.

One of the Five Mindfulness Trainings, the Fourth Mindfulness Training, is about the practice of deep listening and loving speech. You know that without practicing mindful walking, mindful breathing, without being able to embrace your pain while breathing deeply, we cannot do this deep

listening. Therefore, it all a practice which you have to apply in your daily lives. When you are in a mindfulness retreat, you must make all efforts to learn and to make a firm beginning in the practice. Every day of practice will bring you more strength, and you will learn the art of living mindfully. You will learn how to walk, how to sit, how to breathe, how to listen, and how to use calm and loving speech. When you go back home you have to arrange things in such a way that your practice will continue. If you have a partner who can practice with you, you are very lucky. If you have a child who is ready to practice with you, that is very good. But if you are alone, you can practice in such a way that others can see you are now a more pleasant person, more fresh, more loving. We have confidence in the practice because the practice can modify everything. And the practice begins with you, yourself, and then it will increase and go to others and touch those who live with you. You don't have to wait for the other to change. You should begin to change yourself, in your own way, with your own words, by your listening, by your walking, by your way of eating and your way of living your daily life. Then the peace, happiness and calm in you will be noticed by others. In this way you have begun to change the situation, through change in yourself, before you are able to change what is outside of yourself.

(Bell)

We all have a tendency to blame the other person. If things are not going well, we say that it's his fault, or her fault. If something's going wrong, it must be him, or it must be her—it's not me! The Buddha said, "This is because that is; this is not, because that is not. This is like this, because that is like that." He used very simple words. You want to change the other person, whether it happens to be your child or your spouse, but you don't think about changing yourself. First of all the change has to take place in you—the way you listen, the way you speak, the way you walk, the way you sit down, the way you work—you can change it all, you can better it all, in order to help others to change.

(Bell)

The Buddha has taught us six ways of going beyond, of going over to the shore of non-suffering. In order to be able to cross the river of our difficulties and arrive at the other side, the shore of well being. This teaching is called the teaching of the Six *Paramitas*, the six ways of going across, of going over. If you're angry, you're on this side of the river, but you shouldn't stay on this side of the river. You should do something to get to the other side, the side of well being. This is something we can do in our daily lives. Often we find ourselves in a difficult position, which has been brought about by our own psyche; we can do something in order to get out of this position. The heart of the practice is mindfulness. We all know that mindfulness is an energy which allows us to be there in the present moment, to become really present, to become truly and totally alive. I'm going to draw something. This is a circle, with this character, which means mindfulness. The Chinese word for mindfulness is written like this: the top half means now, and underneath we have the character which means mind. Your mind comes back to the present moment, that is what is meant by mindfulness. So breathing in, or taking a step, you're able to bring your body and your mind back together, and suddenly you are really there in the here and the now. This state of being is called the oneness of body and mind. It's a very simple practice, but it's very efficient and it's very efficacious. Only one breathing in or breathing out will bring you back to the present moment, and there you will be able to touch life deeply.

I'm drawing a petal, because the Six Paramitas, the six crossings-over, are thought of as a flower. The first practice is called the practice of giving. You have to know how to give, and if you are able to give, you will go beyond suffering, and you will re-establish well being in yourself. What do you have to give? Do you need money in order to be able to give? No. You always have something to give, and I want to tell you that the most precious thing that you can give is your presence. You can always offer your presence to someone as a gift. When you love someone, what can you give them, what can you do, to have something to give them? You can give your presence, because without being present you cannot have love. To love means to be there, body and mind united. This is something you can do. Breathing mindfully, you come back to yourself, and you can look at the other person and say, "Darling, I am here for you." If you are not there, how can you love? We are all so busy, and our presence for the person we love is something very rare.

I know a child of eleven years old, and his father asked him, "Tomorrow is your birthday. Can I buy something for you?" The young man was not interested. His father was extremely rich, and he could have bought anything for his son, but the child didn't need that kind of thing. He had so many toys already. He only needed one thing: his father's presence. When you are rich, you have to use your time and energy to stay rich. You don't have enough time for being with the ones you love. So if a father is intelligent, he will see that the most beautiful present he can give to his child is his own presence. Often we are there physically, but we are not there spiritually. We are lost in the past, in the future, and in our plans. We are not really there. A child is disappointed, a wife is disappointed, a husband is disappointed. You are not really there. So the child can come and touch your shoulder, and he can say, "Is someone home?" You'll come out of your dream, out of your prison, out of the past and the future, and come back to yourself. If the child doesn't do that you'll have to do it for yourself. You have to take some steps into mindfulness, take some breaths in mindfulness, make yourself present, look at your child, and say: "Darling, I am here for you now." You open your arms, and that is the most precious gift you can give to the one you love: your own presence. You don't need money to do this.

When you are there, something else is there too. As I said yesterday, when you are really there, life is there too. Life with all its wonders: the blue sky, the luxurious vegetation, the setting sun, the full moon, the wonderful face of the one you love, all these things are available to you. If you are not there, you will lose it all, these things do not mean anything. But when you are there, the other thing is there too, and you are practicing the recognition of what is beautiful and wonderful in your life. When you are there, the person you love is there too. So you can open your eyes, smile, and make a declaration: "Darling, I know you are there, and it makes me very happy." To be loved is to be recognized as being, as existing, and you should confirm your mindfulness of the other person's existence. "Darling you are there, alive, and that is something very precious as far as I am concerned. I am very happy because of it." With the energy of mindfulness you embrace the one you love, and when someone is surrounded by this wonderful energy, they will open like a flower. That person may be your child, may be your daughter, your son, that person may be your partner. You can have the luxury of the practice, and with one conscious breath, some mindful breathings, some mindful steps, you can bring about your own presence, and make it a present for the one you love.

In tantric Buddhism we practice reciting *dharanis*, and we say that by reciting these magic formulae we change the situation. But now we can recite mantras in French or English. With right mindfulness present in you, you become really there, really alive. You have only to open your mouth and say the words: "Darling, I am here for you. I am really here for you". That is the mantra. The second one: "Darling, I know you are there, and it makes me very happy," is another mantra, something which can make the other person happy straight away, instantly. The essence of the practice is mindfulness, and with mindfulness you are really there, you are there in the situation to be able to recognize the presence of the other person. To be loved is to be recognized as existing.

Remember, there are moments when you are driving your car, and he or she is sitting next to you. You are thinking about everything, but you don't think about the person sitting next to you—you think that you know everything about that person. You can even be singing a song, and thinking about your future and your plans, and you are quite unaware of the person who is sitting next to you. There is no mindfulness. You are not practicing love. Love is the energy of mindfulness which surrounds and embraces the object of your love.

(Bell)

These two mantras can be practiced in French, English, German or Italian. I can assure you that it will work, and lead to the energy of mindfulness. If the energy of mindfulness is in you, the mantras will be very effective. You will see straight away the effect of this practice in the present moment. You should nourish the person you love with mindfulness and with your real presence. You should nourish yourself with this mindfulness, this energy of mindfulness. You should be there for yourself; you should be there for the person you love. You know what to do in order to be there for yourself and for the other.

When the other suffers, which he or she will do from time to time, if you are really there you will notice that there is suffering there, and with the same method you light up the lamp of mindfulness in yourself, you go to him or her, and you recite the third mantra: "Dear one, I know you are suffering, and that is why I am here for you." When you suffer, and the person you love most of all is not aware of it, you suffer even more. But if the person you love is there and is aware that you are suffering, your suffering is already relieved. You suffer much less, because your loved one knows that you are suffering. Before you've actually done anything to help the other, your presence alone has transformed the situation. Your presence is healing and transforming. This is something not difficult to do. Having practiced somewhat, you can change the atmosphere in the family and you can improve the quality of relationship between you and your loved ones.

I have a fourth mantra which is a little difficult to practice, but we need to be able to train to do it. It's an important mantra. You use it when you are suffering yourself, and you think that the other person is the reason for your suffering, the person that you love most of all. It's difficult. If

somebody else had said that, had done that, you would have suffered much less; but because that person, the person you love the most, said that or did that, you suffer a hundred times more. You want to close yourself in your room in order to cry on your own, and if that person comes towards you, you prefer that he or she not touch you: "Leave me alone." That is your natural tendency. When you suffer, you want to be alone. You feel that the other person is the cause of your suffering, and you do not want to be helped by him or her. You want to show that you don't need him or her. This is very childish, but we all do this. When we think that the other person is the reason for our suffering, we want to show them that we can be all alone, that we don't need them. The fourth mantra is something which will help you.

There is a story, a tragedy, which everyone in my country knows about. The story of a man who went to war and left his wife at home, pregnant. When they were separated, they cried a lot, but, fortunately, two years later he came back home. By that time the little boy had been born. His wife and his little boy came to the gate of the village to meet the veteran. He wept in their arms, and then he said to his wife, "Go to the market and buy some things to be able to prepare an offering to put on the ancestral altar, and to announce to the ancestors that the soldier has returned." The ancestors always need to be told the good news.

When his wife was at the market, the husband tried to persuade the child to call him Daddy. "No, mister, you are not my Daddy. My Daddy is someone else. He comes every night, and my Mommy talks a long time to him, many times, and she cries a lot. Each time she sits down, he sits down too. Each time she lies down, he lies down too." The child spoke all these terrible things, and the happiness of the husband disappeared completely. He became a block of ice. When his young wife came home, he did not look at her. His suffering was so great, it came right up to his heart. There was nothing he could do. After he had offered incense to the ancestors, he touched the earth four times, as we do in Vietnam, and he addressed his prayer to the ancestors. Then he rolled up the mat on which he had touched the earth, so that his wife would not be able to touch the earth in front of the ancestors. He thought that his wife was unfaithful to him, and therefore was not worthy to present herself before the ancestors. His wife was still very young, she didn't understand at all why her husband's attitude had changed so drastically after she came back from the market. She suffered too much. She kept all this suffering within her own heart, because she was proud. He was proud. He suffered so much, but his pride was too great to allow him to share his suffering with his wife.

After having told the ancestors the good news that he had returned home, he went out into the village, and he spent all his time in the bar, drinking alcohol. When people suffer a lot, if they do not know how to practice, they use alcohol to drown their suffering. Usually, after an offering like this, the whole family needs to come together before the altar to celebrate the good news; but he went out into the village, and he only came back at two o'clock in the morning. He did this for three or four days, and his wife couldn't bear it any longer. She threw herself into the river and drowned herself.

After hearing the news the young husband came back home to take care of his child. That night, he lit up the kerosene lamp in the house, and the little boy pointed to the shadow of his father, and he said, "Mister, that's my father. He comes every night, and Mommy speaks to him every night, and she cries a lot. And every time she sits down, he sits down too." The child's words! Now the husband began to understand. The father the child talked about was just the shadow thrown onto the wall. His wife had spoken to a shadow every night: "My dear husband, you've been away so long. How can I, all alone, take care of our little boy?" and then she would cry. And of course, every time she sat down, the shadow sat down too. Wrong perception had now been removed, but it was too late. The young lady was already dead, and there was no way to bring her back to life.

If there had been no pride, the young man could have come to his wife and said, "While you were out in the market, our little boy said that someone comes to visit you every night. I don't understand. I'm suffering so much because of this. You have to explain it to me." If he had done this, his young wife would have had an opportunity to explain, and both of them would not have had to undergo the tragedy which happened. But he didn't do that. His wife too had suffered greatly, but the pride she had stopped her going to her husband and saying: "Darling, why are you acting like this? Why are you behaving like this? Since I came back from the market you haven't looked at me, you haven't spoken to me. Have I done something so terrible, to be treated like this?" If his wife had said something like that, then her husband would have been able to explain what had happened, and together they would have not had to go through this tragedy.

All of us, we can make the same mistake in our daily lives, when we suffer, and we think that the other person is the cause of our suffering, we want to be alone, we want to show: "I don't need you any more. I can live without you." This is a very childish attitude, but it always remains in us. So the fourth mantra is to help you to go across the river and reach the other shore. You need mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindfulness in all your activities; and then with calm words you go to the other and you say, "Darling, I am suffering so much. You have to help me; you have to explain: why did you do that? Why did you say that? Without you I cannot get out of this difficulty I'm in." If you have the ability to say such a thing is such a way, then the person you love will have the chance to explain to you, and if there is a wrong perception, you will be able to free yourself from that wrong perception.

In daily life, there are so many wrong perceptions, and sometimes we keep a wrong perception for a very long time. For ten years, twenty years, a wrong perception can destroy our relationship. Therefore, I do not want my friends to make the same mistake as Mr. Truong. Next time you are suffering and you think that the suffering is caused by the person that you love most in the world, remember the fourth mantra. "Darling, I'm suffering so much. I don't understand why you, the person that I love most in the world, could have said something like this, could have done something like this to me. Help me. Explain why you did that." This will bring a lot of mindfulness energy to the other, and the other will say something to help you get out of your difficult situation.

The gift of giving...giving is a way of going across the river of suffering, and establishing yourself on the shore of well being. The first gift you give is your presence, your mindfulness of what is in the present moment. This energy of mindfulness will relieve the suffering, and therefore it is a present you can give to the one you love. The Buddha said when you are angry and you have done everything you can to put an end to your anger, but you have not yet managed to do that, practice giving. Find something and offer it to the person who has caused your suffering, caused your anger, and the Buddha guarantees that after giving your anger will be transformed. I suggest that you do not wait until you are angry to prepare the gift you will be giving. Prepare the gift beforehand. Maybe that person is your father, is your husband, your wife, your partner. Sometimes you are angry with him or her; therefore, prepare yourself in advance, before it happens again, and have a present ready, or kind words written, and keep the present in your house. When you feel angry and you have done everything you can to get over your anger but it doesn't work, you bring out your present, you go to the Post Office, and you send it to him or her. You don't have to wait. Once you have sent the present in the post, you will already feel that your anger has been transformed. If you are angry with someone, give him or her something. That is what the Buddha said. Giving is a way, a wonderful way, to come to the other shore.

Another petal is called mindfulness, mindfulness training. This is the practice of protection. The five Mindfulness Trainings are to protect you and your loved ones. If you live according to the insight of the Five Mindfulness Trainings, you will be able to put yourself in a safe place. If you love someone, you should practice the mindfulness trainings. It's a kind of gift. When love is new, you want the person you love to be safe. Therefore, you can sign up with an insurance company, you think only in monetary terms. We can protect our selves and the people we love with money, but there are other ways to protect oneself. According to the Buddha, to protect oneself with mindfulness is the surest way to protect yourself. There are countries where, when we say goodbye to somebody, we say, "Take care." Either at the beginning of a journey, or just at the beginning of a day, we say: "Take good care." In Vietnam, and in China, we say *than trong*. "Take care." It expresses love. If you love someone, look after yourself. Looking after yourself, you look after the one you love. It's very clear.

You love your child, but you cannot be with your child 24hrs a day, your child has to go to school. Your child has to be in touch with others in the society, so he is at risk. How can you make your child secure, safe? When something happens to you, it happens to your child; when something happens to your child, it happens to you. You and your child inter-are. We inter-are. Therefore, to protect oneself is to protect the other, and helping the other to protect themselves is to protect yourself. That is exactly what we are learning here in the Five Mindfulness Trainings. If you study deeply the nature of the Five Mindfulness Trainings, you will see that they are realistic ways to protect you, to protect your loved ones, and to protect your society. For example, the Fourth Mindfulness Training, which concerns the art of deep listening and loving speech. If you train yourself to listen deeply, to speak lovingly, you will protect yourself and you will protect other members of your family. There are so many families which are broken because people cannot communicate between themselves within the family. We are not capable of listening, of speaking calmly, and we provoke dangerous situations in our families. Separation is a dangerous situation. Hate is a dangerous situation. And they come from us, ourselves. It's not like a car accident, which can happen because of somebody else's driving. The seed of anger is always there in us, and our lack of mindfulness can always put our anger into motion. So to practice mindful speech and listening will protect you and the others.

The Fifth Mindfulness Training concerns consumption, the practice of mindful consumption. We know that we can ingest elements that bring war

and disorder into our body. We can ingest elements that will destroy our minds. When a child is exposed to television programs which are not healthy, this is dangerous consumption. When you read a book, when you look at television, you are consuming. When you listen to a conversation which contains a lot of poisons and despair, you are consuming these things. We are prey to so many toxins in our daily lives. Therefore, the Fifth Mindfulness Training is to protect us and our loved ones by mindful consumption. Before eating something, we have to look deeply to see whether this food is going to destroy or nourish us. The same is true for spiritual nourishment, magazines, television programs, conversations—all these things can be toxic. We have to practice mindfulness in order to understand, in order to identify the products which we consume. Can they help us to heal? We should avoid all kinds of products which will ruin us. And so we come together as a family, as a Sangha, and we make laws concerning consumption. If we are depressed, it is because we have consumed without mindfulness, we have allowed toxins and poisons to come into us. By our consumption, we have listened, we have looked, we have thought, we have allowed these toxic elements to come into us. To consume mindfully is a way to protect ourselves, which is very effective and absolutely necessary. If you are able to apply this practice in your family, there will be perfect security for your family. If you can live with these protections, that is the most beautiful gift you can give to your society, and to your family. Therefore the practice of mindful consumption is a form of gift.

So many families have been broken by sexual misconduct. We are talking about the Third Mindfulness Training. Sex without love and a real long-term commitment is empty sex, and it's dangerous. We think that the emptiness in us will dissolve if we have a sexual relationship with another person. We feel a vacuum, an emptiness within ourselves, and we cannot bear this: "I don't want to undergo this." We feel too lonely, and we think that our loneliness will dissolve when we have sexual relations with another person. When two bodies come together in a sexual way, there must be mutual understanding, there must be deep and perfect communication, so that the sexual act is not empty. We live in a time when young people practice empty sex, and this is very dangerous. At thirteen or fourteen years old, when they don't know anything about real love, they have sex, which is something very destructive. We have live in such a way, and tell our children, that it is very dangerous to have empty sex, because empty sex will stop you being able to experience real love in the future. Real love only comes from deeply understanding each other. There has to be perfect communication, there has to be deep sharing, as far as our ideals in life are concerned.

We have to be in agreement about how we will get out of our difficulties together, we have to know how to be partners in the family and in the society, before we have sexual relations. Because of empty sex and violence, young people today can destroy everything. We have to give them a good example. We have to live in a way that shows young people the way, and therefore the Third Mindfulness Training is about protection of the family, of children, from sexual abuse. Our society has been damaged by this sexual misconduct. As a Sangha, we should get together and practice looking deeply to find ways to protect ourselves and to protect our families against this practice of empty sex, which is truly destructive. We will continue this teaching on Sunday in Vietnamese. First of all giving, and then the practice of Mindfulness Trainings. We are going to talk about the practice of inclusiveness.

As far as I am concerned, the practice of the Five Mindfulness Trainings is the only way to help us get out of our difficult situation in our society today. I am sure that if everyone could go back to their spiritual source, and practice looking deeply, they would discover the equivalent of the Five Mindfulness Trainings in their own traditions. They are not things imposed on us by someone else. They are the result of the deep insight that we have discovered when we live in mindfulness. You know what is happening. You know about the destruction, the pain the suffering which reigns in the world, and when you look deeply at the world, you see that if we have this kind of suffering, it is because we have done something, or we have failed to do something. Therefore, we come to a kind of wisdom, and that wisdom is that we should live mindfully in order to restructure our own lives, our family life and our social life. If you ask me what we can do to get out of this difficult situation, I would say quite simply, live according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings. The Five Mindfulness Trainings give a very concrete way to live our daily lives mindfully. Mindfulness manifests concretely in the Five Mindfulness Trainings, which can be seen as the way of liberation, the path of emancipation.

(Three Bells)

End of Dharma talk.

My dear friends, today is the 4th of August, 1998, and we are in the Upper Hamlet for our Questions and Answers hour.

I will take one question directly from the audience, and then one from my desk top. I would like first to take a question directly from the Sangha.

*Dear Thay, yesterday you spoke about contemplating impermanence in accordance with the Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing. My question is this: when we contemplate impermanence, do we include in that contemplation the phenomena of time and space? Should they also be considered as impermanent?*

We know that when we really touch the nature of impermanence, we also touch the nature of interbeing. Impermanence makes life possible, makes things possible. To be impermanent means not to be the same thing in two consecutive moments, and there is always something coming in and something going out. Every thing is interacting with every other thing, and therefore touching impermanence is also touching interbeing. Interbeing means you don't have a separate existence, you inter-are with everything else.

When we contemplate space, we know that space cannot be space by itself alone. Space has to interbe with time and matter, and everything. When we look into the nature of space, we also touch the nature of impermanence, we also touch the nature of interbeing, and we can see everything else in space. We can see matter in space; we can see time in space. Suppose we talk about spring. What is spring? Spring sounds like time—spring is followed by summer, then fall and winter—but spring is very much involved with space, because when it is spring here in Europe, it is not spring in Australia. So we know that in space there is time, and in time there is space. Even what we call the present moment cannot be by itself alone. The present moment has to be with past moments and future moments.

When you look at the sun in the morning—where I sit in the morning I always see the sun rising from the horizon—you might think that you are seeing the sun of the present moment; but scientists tell us that that is the sun of eight minutes ago. The image of the sun you see is an image sent by the sun to you eight minutes ago. So the present moment has to do with space, not only with time. But you can still live in the present moment even if you know that this is the image of the sun eight minutes ago. The present moment has to do with the "here", and therefore time and space are not separate entities, and looking into the one, we see the all. The insight of interbeing helps us to understand better the nature of non-self, the nature of impermanence.

Many teachers, many philosophers, spoke about impermanence. Heraclitus and Confucius also spoke about impermanence, but the impermanence spoken of by the Buddha is not a philosophy. It is an instrument for your practice of looking deeply. So use the key of impermanence in order to unlock the door of reality, and when you use the key of impermanence you unlock the nature of interbeing, of no self, of emptiness. That is why you should not look on impermanence as a notion, a theory, or a philosophy, but as an instrument offered by the Buddha so that we can practice looking deeply and discover the true nature of reality.

*Thay, I have just been nominated to be a judge for the year 1999, in order to judge people. How do I reconcile justice and compassion?*

I believe that true justice should have compassion in it. When someone does something harmful, destructive, the destruction is done not only to the person who is the victim, but it is also done to the person who has committed the destruction. We all know that every time we say something unskillful, that can damage our relationship to the other person, making him or her suffer, we know that we have also done harm to ourselves, and created suffering for ourselves. That comes from our lack of skillfulness, our lack of mindfulness, and our lack of compassion, and we suffer as the other person suffers. Maybe not right now, but a little bit later we will suffer. The real cause of the action is our ignorance, our lack of skillfulness.

In any kind of relationship there is always a willingness not to make the other person suffer: "Darling, I don't want to make you suffer." That is true, but because we are not mindful enough, we do not have the right perception of what things are, and because of the negative habit energy in us, we may do things that cause others to suffer. That is not out of my willingness, because I may have made a vow to make you happy, to make you suffer less. That is why we should try to look into the nature of interbeing to see that we ourselves may be the victims of a collective consciousness, of the transmission of negative seeds by our ancestors, by our parents. If we make others suffer, that is because we are also victims.

So if we know how to look at the so-called criminals, we will have compassion. Society has created them like that; they have not been lucky, they have been born into a situation where social conditions, and their parents and other influences, have created that kind of behavior, and that person is very much the victim of the situation. If we see that, we see the nature of interbeing in that kind of act, we will be able to be compassionate, and the punishment that we propose in that case will be lighter, because we want justice. That's not only understanding; that's not only compassion—although there is understanding that has brought compassion—but that's also justice.

Consider a sea pirate who rapes a young girl belonging to the boat people. If you have a gun you can kill him, but you cannot help him. He may have been born to a very poor fisherman along the coast, his father and his grandfather living a very hard life. In order to forget that kind of hardship it may be that they used to drink in the evening, and they came home late at night. Perhaps the mother of the young man did not know how to read and to write and to give him a good education, and the young boy played with delinquents. When he reached the age of fourteen or fifteen he had to go to sea and help his father in the fishing business. Then when his father passed away he had to continue the business, and his life was very hard. And suddenly someone said, "You only have to make it once. The refugees might bring a little bit of gold with them, so if we stop just one refugee boat and take the gold and their valuables, then we can get out of this situation of chronic poverty. Just one!" The young fisherman agreed, and there on the high sea they caught the boat people, and he saw another person violating a lady. He looked around, and he didn't see any policemen. So he just said, "I have never tried this. I want to try it once." And then he



became a molester, a rapist.

If you were on the boat and you had a gun, and you shot him in order to save the girl, you could kill him, but you could not help him. Of course you would try to do anything in order to save the girl, but if you cannot, you will shoot him. You want the girl to be alive, not to be raped, and the sea pirate not to be shot, but if there is no other way, you might choose to kill him. But he was born into that life, and he has been a victim since he has come to life. Nobody has helped him. Educators, legislators, politicians, businessmen, humanitarians, humanists, no one has helped him, and that is why he is what he is there—he is a victim. If you kill him, you can call it justice, but I think that is less than justice, because he has not been helped at all.

When I heard news of events such as this, I could not eat. It's difficult to eat your breakfast when you hear this kind of news, and I had to do walking meditation in the woods in order to digest that kind of hardship. During sitting meditation one night, I saw that if I had been born like that pirate, in the coastal area of Thailand, and I had such a father, such a mother, I would now be a sea pirate. We are products of our society, of our environment, to a very large extent. That's why looking deeply helps us to understand and to have compassion. With compassion, you can always offer a kind of justice that will contain more patience, understanding and tolerance.

Here is another related question: *Thay, what are your views on capital punishment? Suppose someone has killed ten children. Why should he be allowed to live on?*

Ten people are dead; now you want another one, you want eleven. A person who has killed ten children is a sick person. Of course we want to lock him up to prevent him killing more, but that is a sick person, and we have to find ways to help that person. Killing him does not help him, and does not help us. There are others like him in society, and looking at him deeply we know that something is wrong with our society; our society has created people like that. Therefore, looking at him, we can see in the light of interbeing the other elements that have produced him. That is how your understanding arises in yourself, and then you see that that person is there for you to help, and not to punish. Of course you have to lock him up for the safety of other children, but locking him up is not the only thing you can do. We can do other things to help him. Punishing is not the only thing, we can do much better.

Recently Buddhist books on meditation, Buddhist magazines, and even Dharma talks have been offered in prisons, and many inmates have been practicing accordingly. Several of them have gotten relief, and have been able to live peacefully in prison. I myself get a number of letters from prisoners, and many of them come from prisons in North America—who have read my books. One person said, "Thay, when I stand above the staircase and look down, and see other inmates running up and down, I can see their suffering, their agitation. I hope they can do as I do, walking down and up the staircase in mindfulness, following my breathing. When I do that, I feel peace within myself, and when I feel peace within myself I can see very clearly the suffering of other inmates." That person has been able to create, to give rise to the compassion within him. You know, when we have compassion in our hearts, we don't suffer too much. When compassion is there in our hearts, we are not the person who suffers the most.

There is another prisoner who received a copy of *Being Peace*, a photocopy, and later on he got the real book *Being Peace*, so he had two copies. He had stopped smoking, but he still kept some tobacco. One day the fellow next to his cell banged on the wall and shouted to ask for some tobacco. Although he did not smoke anymore, he wanted to offer him this tobacco. And he took the first page of *Being Peace*, and he wrapped some tobacco in it, and sneaked it to the other side, with the hope that the other person might enjoy being peace. He himself had enjoyed being peace, and had started practicing sitting meditation in his cell. He just gave a small amount of that tobacco, and the next time he used page two, then page three...He was on death row. Finally he had transferred the whole set of copied pages to the other prisoner. It was wonderful—the other prisoner began to practice in his cell, and became very quiet. In the beginning he had banged, and shouted, and cursed. But finally he became very subdued and very calm, and he was released. In order to thank the other person, he passed in front of the cell, and they looked at each other, and together they recited one sentence from the book, which they both knew by heart. That prisoner on death row was able to write a whole book on his practice, within his cell, and the book has been published by a publisher outside.

So it is clear that punishment is not the only thing we can do. There is much more we can do in order to help. Transformation and healing is possible in these difficult situations. Another prisoner wrote to me, saying, "Thay, I am very surprised to find that I can still retain my humanness in prison, and that I have not gone mad. That is thanks to the practice. My only hope is that one day when I am released, and someone comes to see me and looks at my face, and says, 'With the amount of suffering he endured in prison, yet he can look like that...' that would be wonderful, the greatest reward that I could get." He said that the conditions in which he lived, the suffering he endured in jail, you could not imagine. But he has managed, in order to survive, to keep his humanness alive through all these difficulties. If we suffer less outside here, and have a little bit of time, of course we can do something to help those inside. That is why killing that person only reveals our weakness. We surrender. We don't know what to do any more, and we give up. That is a cry of despair, when you have to kill people. I hope that together we can practice looking deeply in order to find better means than to approve of capital punishment. My answer to the question is that not only can we reconcile justice and compassion, but we can also demonstrate that true justice must have compassion and understanding in it.

(Bell)

*What do you do when you give joy? How do you offer joy to a person in a mindful way? You talked once about practicing mindfulness so that you've enlarged your heart, so that you can receive any suffering without being harmed by it. Can you talk about this more?*

It seems to me that when there is joy with you, that joy will not only benefit yourself, but also benefit the people around you,

provided that joy is true joy. True joy is the joy that can help our bodies and our consciousness. Joy is a nutriment, a factor of nutrition. In the Buddhist circles the practice of meditation is described as daily food, and in the practice of meditation joy and concentration are very important elements. If while practicing meditation you don't feel joy, then something is wrong with your practice. If you suffer during the practice of walking and sitting meditation, I don't think you are doing the right practice. The joy in you will have an effect on your body and your consciousness, and it will have an effect on the people who are in touch with you.

When you practice looking deeply you know how that joy has come to you, based on what conditions. You might like that joy to continue to come, and you may like to look at the other person, and suggest to him or to her that if these conditions are sufficient, then she will also have the same kind of joy that will nourish her and the people around her. So share your joy in these two ways. Even if you don't want to share your joy, it will be shared, because when you are joyful, you are happy, you inspire us. You make the atmosphere around us light and the air easy to breathe. You can do other things; you can make suggestions and collaborate with other people in order to create the kind of collective joy that will benefit many people. We chant every day: "I vow to offer joy to one person in the morning, and to relieve the suffering of one person in the evening." But that is the minimum, because if you can offer joy to one person, you are already offering joy to many people, because the joy of one person can affect many other people.

The practice of looking deeply will bring insight, and will help our hearts to open up. When our hearts are larger, we have a better capacity to receive, and to embrace the negative elements in order to transform them. If you suffer too much, that is because your heart is still small. According to the teaching of the Four Unlimited Minds, it is possible that the practice of looking deeply will help you to understand better and better, and as your understanding grows, your compassion and your loving-kindness will grow also. In this teaching, love and understanding are the same thing. Compassion and loving-kindness are made of a substance called understanding, and understanding cannot be possible without looking deeply into the matter.

The Buddha said, "Suppose you have a cup of pure water; if you have a handful of salt, and you pour it into that water and stir it up, you cannot drink it anymore, because it's too salty. But if you take the same amount of salt, and pour it into the river, then the river is so large that it is not affected, and all of us can continue to drink the water from the river. The river is enormous, that is why it has the capacity to receive, to embrace and to transform. If our hearts are big, we can do very much the same thing. We suffer because our hearts are small; it means that our understanding and compassion are too limited." This is a wonderful Dharma talk that the Buddha gave to the young novice Rahula. He said, "Rahula, practice to be like the earth. Why? No matter what people pour onto the earth, whether it's milk, cream, flowers, perfume or urine, excrement, the earth will not discriminate. It will receive them all, and the earth will not suffer. Why? Because the earth is large, and in no time at all the earth can transform all these things into flowers and green leaves. So practice, Rahula, in order to be like the earth. You can accept, receive, and embrace everything, and you don't have to suffer. Sometime later you can transform all this garbage into flowers again. Practice like the air; no matter what you throw into it, the air can receive, embrace and transform it, and that is because the air is large. Practice in order to be like water. Water has the same capacity of receiving, embracing and transforming. And practice to be like fire, because whatever you give to fire, whether it's beautiful or ugly, clean or dirty, the fire will burn them all, and reduce everything to ash. Because the fire is large, the fire has the capacity to transform. That is why, Rahula, you should practice like the earth, like the water, like the air, like the fire, so that your heart becomes unlimited. Anything negative, any insult, any action that is unkind to you, you can embrace all, and you don't have to suffer, because your heart is so large. That is why it is said in the sutra that if you suffer too much, that is because your heart is still not large. In order to make your heart large, the practice of looking deeply will help, because it will bring understanding. When understanding is there, compassion and forgiveness will be possible.

(Bell)

*Thay, what do you mean when you say to go back to our religious roots? How can we do that and continue to study and practice Buddhism, which is so practical and helpful?*

I think we have to look into our religious roots, because sometimes we are not capable of identifying our spiritual roots. If you are a Buddhist, then you know that Buddha is a root, but you are aware that before the Buddha there was already something—the Buddha was somebody who also had roots. So your roots did not begin with the Buddha. To inquire about the Buddha and the ancestors of the Buddha is important.

When you are a Christian, of course Jesus Christ is your spiritual root, but before Christianity there were other things. Therefore it is interesting and even exciting to inquire about our roots. Our roots can be very old, and our roots can also be new. We inherit things like democracy and freedom. The people who made democracy and freedom possible for us to enjoy are our roots also, so to go back and search for our roots is a very joyful, very important thing. Of course, we will encounter negative aspects and elements, but that does not prevent us going back to our own source. Our roots are also the roots of many people around us. If we can go back to our roots and try to discover the real values, the jewels contained in that tradition, we will be able to benefit many people who have come from these roots. This morning a young person asked me what should she do if she is in love with a young man who belongs to another religious tradition, since she doesn't want to betray her roots. She is a Buddhist, and the other family might require that she abandon her Buddhism to become a Catholic.

I would like to tell you a story. Thirty five years ago I had a student who fell in love with a young man who was Catholic, and the family of that young man required that the young lady abandon the practice of Buddhism in order to be baptized as a Catholic. That was the basic condition for the marriage, and she suffered very much. Her family was also opposed to that. She cried and cried, and one day she came to me. I said that Buddhism is not there to make you unhappy. Buddhism is not an obstacle, so I think in the name of the Buddha I can tell you that you can become a Catholic and marry him, but I would like to make a recommendation. You have received The Five Mindfulness Trainings; you should continue to look on them as the guidelines of your life. You don't have to be called a Buddhist; you only have to be a true Buddhist within yourself. Live

accordingly and practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings, and that would make me happy enough. She was so joyful that she was allowed to marry the person she loved. But she did not sleep during that night, and the next morning she came very early, and she said, "Thay, a tradition that is so embracing, so tolerant, so open, if I abandon it and turn my back to it, I am not a person of value. A tradition that is so strict, that has no tolerance, that is not able to understand, how could I formally identify myself with it?" So she just refused to get married to that person. I thought that I would help her get married to that young man, but I caused the opposite to happen. Today, thirty-five years later, she is here somewhere in this Sangha.

When I was in Korea a few years ago, I participated in the first dialogue between Buddhists and Christians, and I said that many young people have suffered due to being caught in that kind of situation. So I proposed that we should be able to allow Buddhists and Christians to marry each other, with the condition that the young man would learn and also practice the tradition of the young woman, and the young woman would also learn and practice the tradition of the young man. Instead of having one root, you have two roots. Why not? If you love mangoes, you are free to continue to eat mangoes, but no one forbids you to eat pineapples or oranges. Your favorite fruit is the mango, yes, but you don't betray your mango when you eat pineapple. I think it's too narrow-minded, even stupid, to enjoy only mango, when there are so many different fruits around in the world. Spiritual traditions are like spiritual fruits, and you have the right to enjoy them. It is possible to enjoy two traditions, to take the best of two traditions and live with that. If you like to eat Italian food, you can still enjoy French and Chinese cooking. You cannot say, "I have to be faithful to my Italian cooking"—that's too funny.

This year I would like to publish another book, as a continuation of my book *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. I would like to publish the book with the title: *Buddha and Jesus as Brothers*. In fact, they could have taken each other's hands and practiced walking meditation, so why not the two of you, one as a Buddhist and one as a Christian? You are the continuation of the Buddha, and you are the continuation of Jesus Christ. That is only beautiful, if you can share your wisdom, your insights, and you can learn from each other and enrich yourselves. That is what I envision for the future, that we remove the barriers between different spiritual traditions, and we behave as people do in the circle of psychotherapists. They enjoy and learn from all other traditions, and I think that each tradition of psychotherapy has something to offer. It's too narrow if we only want to be faithful to one school of psychotherapy.

You are welcome to continue your practice of Buddhist meditation, because you find it practical and helpful, transforming and healing. But you can think of other people who have come from the same tradition as you, and who have not encountered the practice. You can do it by sharing your Buddhist practice, and also proposing to them that you go back to your spiritual roots, and you might discover things that you have not seen. You might begin anew, so that your tradition will become very refreshing, something that can provide true answers to the questions of the new generations, and that will benefit many people. When I say that you have to go back to your roots, that does not mean that you have to abandon the Buddhist practice that you enjoy now. But the Buddhist practice will help you to understand more deeply, so that your work of transformation and renewing of your tradition will be possible; and especially so that your heart will open to embrace the people who do not seem to be open and understanding enough when they try to transmit their tradition and values to the new generations of people.

(Bell)

*When I have to work a problem out, I find it helpful sometimes to speak out loud, but I wonder if that is helpful to the practice, or whether it is best to keep this questioning quiet?*

I think you must feel free to speak to yourself, while waiting for a Sangha to be set up. But I think that setting up a Sangha is so important. You have to identify right away the second member of your Sangha, even today, even if he or she is not here, you have to identify him or her and make a phone call right away.

You know that elements of our Sangha are always there. That may be a tree, that may be a rock, that may be the blue sky, that may be a path for walking meditation, and you can talk to them right now. Your little boy, your daughter, can be a member of your Sangha. So please, take time to look. Members of your future Sangha may be already there. With a little bit of the practice of looking deeply, you can already identify them. It's very urgent. Taking refuge in the Sangha is a very urgent task. Without a Sangha, we cannot continue our practice for a long time.

In my country, people used to say that when a tiger leaves her mountain and goes to the lowlands, she will be caught by humans and killed. A practitioner leaving her Sangha will abandon her practice very soon. So if you have left your Sangha, you have to go back right away. Or if you have not been in touch with a Sangha, try your best to identify and belong to one, and to improve the quality of your Sangha. I remember in a retreat in America there was someone who was going to South Africa, and she asked how she could continue her practice if she was away from her Sangha. I told her that on her arrival she had to set up a Sangha right away. You don't need people to kneel down and receive the Five Mindfulness Trainings in order to be members of your Sangha. Every one that you meet, everyone that you do business with, may become members of your Sangha, because the way you walk, the way you sit, the way you drink tea, may affect him or her. If you have peace, freedom, solidity and joy in these things, people will be attracted to you. If you are pleasant to them, then whatever you propose for them to do, such as sitting down and having tea quietly, they will do. Although you don't use Buddhist terms, although you don't burn incense and bow like this, you can already set up a Sangha. Intelligent practice does not need a lot of appearance. Slowly, people will inquire about your tradition, and you will show them little by little. You begin with things that people can enjoy the most first. So please talk to yourself today or tomorrow, but don't waste a minute, use your time to form your Sangha right now.

*Bonjour, Thay. Je me sens mal à l'aise, lorsque les personnes disent que le Zen est une secte. Que faut-il les répondre? I feel ill at ease when people say that Zen is a sect. How should I answer them?*

I don't know. (Laughter.) If you say Zen is not a sect, that does not seem to help. And if you say Zen is a sect, well, that does

not help either. People have an idea about a sect as something that can cause damage to their children and to members of their family, whose practice can cause their family to break, can take away their daughter, take away their son, and take away their husband. Even if you are the best Zen organization, if your organization produces such phenomena, and if they call you a sect, you are not a truly Buddhist center of practice. So it depends on the content. You cannot just use your time to argue whether Zen is a sect or not a sect. I think we should invite people to come and participate in our activities and our life. Once they see that this practice is providing people with more understanding, more communication, and more compassion, then they will know that it is something that is important and useful to society and to mankind.

People have ideas, and if we go around and try to change their ideas, we won't have enough time. I remember once I was walking with many people in Philadelphia, asking for the bombing in Vietnam to stop. A reporter came to me and asked me: "Are you from the North or are you from the South?" To him, if I was from the North, I would be anti-American, a Communist; and if I were from the South, I would be an anti-Communist, and so on. I was walking mindfully, and he was holding out the microphone, and I stopped for a second, and I said, "I am from the center." They have an idea, and they want you to identify the box that you belong in, but what happens if you don't belong in any of the categories in their minds? So maybe Zen is not a sect, and maybe Zen is not a non-sect either. It is the reality of the thing that matters, and not the name they call it. I think that sometimes in the name of prestigious traditions, we can do harm to people also. There are priests who do not practice, who are heads of big churches and temples, and yet they don't practice. They betray their own spiritual values. Although they are not called a sect, they are producing a lot of harm around them, causing people not to believe in the way any more. Therefore, I think we should help people to understand that what is important is the reality, the content of it, and not the words that are used to describe it.

(Bell)

*The historical and the ultimate dimensions, are they separate or not separate?*

I think that I have made it clear that the two dimensions belong to the same reality, and when you touch one dimension deeply, you touch the other dimension.

*Dear Thay, when I understand the concept of the ultimate dimension, the way I can make sense of it is in terms the experiences that I have had, which in one sense belong to the historical dimension, because I have had these experiences directly. And yet when we talk about historical and ultimate dimension as dimensions, and that they sometimes touch, I feel confused about whether the reality that I experience has these dimensions both at the same time, or somehow I live in the historical dimension most of the time, but occasionally I can see the ultimate dimension, which is somewhere else.*

I think that continued practice is the answer, because in the beginning there may be short moments when we are capable of touching the ultimate dimension, but if we keep the practice, if we know how to touch more deeply, to look deeply, then even if we are in the historical dimension, we can also touch the ultimate dimension. You don't have to stop being a wave to begin to be water. You are a wave; you think that you are only a wave, but if you touch yourself deeply, you will find out that you are also the water at the same time. So the answer is that you don't have to stop being a wave in order to be water—you are water already.

In one of the sutras it is said that you don't have to look for Nirvana, you have been Nirvanized for a long time. You are already dwelling in Nirvana. Your nature is the nature of no-birth and no-death. Let us look into the nature of a wave. First of all, a wave imagines that she is this wave, and that she is not the other waves. How could I be this wave, and all the waves at the same time? My wave is limited, my existence is limited. I have a beginning, I have an end, and I am less beautiful than you are, or I am higher than the other wave. All these kind of notions—we live superficially in the historical dimension and we get caught in these notions. But in the same dimension, the historical dimension, if you know how to touch more deeply that dimension, you discover that even your form is conditioned by all the other waves, that the one is made of the all; and you are not limited by this form, you are at the same time the other.

The nature of interbeing shows you that you are everything, that is why it will release you from the idea that you are only this: "This body is me; if this body is dissolved, there will be no me." That is the beginning. Master Tang Hoi recommended that we release that kind of idea. So the enlightened people, when they release this body, when they let go of this body, they do not have the feeling that they are lost, that they are no longer there. You are a multitude, you are large; if you identify yourself with one form, one sound, one feeling, you will be subject to fear, to limitation. That is why it is perfectly possible that while being a wave you can live the life of the water, and you can live the life of all the waves at the same time. It is like a mother who is capable of living the life of her sons and daughters. It is like a teacher who can live the life of all his students. To him, the leaving of this body is nothing, because he has so many bodies.

One day a novice was massaging my back, and I asked him, "My child, do you think that this back is mine? Do you think that tomorrow this back will no longer be here for you to massage, that I will stop being?" and he said, "No, Dear Thay, this back is not you. You have many other backs, and I will continue to massage them all my life. My own back is your back, and the backs of my older and younger brothers are also your back." That is the practice of looking deeply. Looking deeply has the power to bring you insight that can liberate you from your fear, from your tendency to identify yourself with such forms, such sounds, such touch, such odor, etc.

(Bell)

*Thay, what is the purpose of our emotions? Why do we have a physiological expression of emotions like crying or sobbing when we are sad, shaking or sweating when we are frightened? I believe most animals don't cry like humans.*

The body is involved in all our sensations, feelings, and emotions. What happens in the realm of the physiological will have an

effect on the realm of the mental, and vice-versa. Even if you don't want to express your emotion and your feeling physiologically, your body will express it anyway. As practitioners, we should call on the positive elements in us, both physiological and mental, in cases of crisis. This is just intelligent practice. We have elements that are vulnerable in the realm of consciousness, we have elements that are vulnerable in the realm of the physiological, but we do have elements that are stable and that we can rely on in times of crisis.

So the answer is that when you get into a crisis, you should not allow yourself to be overwhelmed or crushed, or destroyed by the negative. People who are not practitioners do that, and they can hit the bottom of pain and suffering, and they cause suffering to the people around them. But for us practitioners that is not the way we do it. We have to call on the positive aspects within to help, and we also have the right to call on positive aspects around us to help, namely our Sangha, our brothers and sisters. Don't lock yourself in behind your door, and fight alone. That is also the benefit of having a Sangha, a Dharma brother or sister. So in you there is the energy of mindfulness, the energy of understanding, the capacity of being peace—you have proved that sometimes you have the capacity of smiling, of being peace. Sometimes you have proved that you have the capacity of breathing mindfully in times of crisis. That is your natural, existing capacity; that is not something superficial, that is not there to suppress you, or to do something unnatural. It is as natural as the negative things. So every time you feel that the destructive energy is coming up, and you know that a storm is forming, then as a practitioner you know how to prepare for it, how to be ready for the storm. It's like your house, your tent, when rain is coming, and there is wind, and you should know what to do in order to protect yourself against the storm.

We should not fight, we should not suppress. We should make ourselves available, ready to take care of it and to embrace it, whether that is fear, or despair, or anger, or jealousy. Our bodies may have the capacity of sitting still in a position that can help. The position of our bodies plays a role in our emotions and in our feelings. Walking mindfully is also a wonderful means to prepare ourselves. Going back to our breath and breathing mindfully and deeply is a wonderful practice. If we know how to mobilize all of these elements, then we will not be afraid, whatever emotion, whatever feeling, whatever fear and despair comes up, we will be ready to greet it and embrace it: "Darling, I am here for you; don't worry, I will take good care of you, like a mother taking care of her baby." I always recommend that we practice daily in order to get ready for these difficult moments. We should not wait for these strong storms to arrive in order to start the practice—it may be a little bit too late.

The practice is that when the emotions come up we have to put ourselves into a position that is the most stable, and we should not dwell on the level of our thinking and our emotions. We should go down, because we are like a tree with roots. When there is a storm the little branches and the leaves on the top will be the first victims. They sway back and forth very violently in the wind, and when we look at the top of the tree, we feel that the tree is very vulnerable and can be broken at any time. But when we direct our gaze to the trunk of the tree, and we see that the tree is deeply rooted in the soil, we have another feeling. We feel that the tree will stand. At that moment the more helpful thing to do is to direct our attention to our roots, and physiologically our roots are somewhere here, a little bit below our navel. If you go back to your in-breath and out-breath, and breathe mindfully, and pay attention to the rise and fall of your abdomen, and continue that practice you will be in the safest situation, and no emotion can get you down.

We should know that an emotion is something that comes, that stays for a while, and finally will have to go. If we know how to be our best during this moment, we will be able to handle that emotion easily. There are many young people who don't know anything about that art, and who suffer so much when they are taken by a strong emotion. They may suffer so much that they believe that the only way to end the suffering is to kill themselves. That is why so many young people have committed suicide. They don't understand that they are so much more than their emotions. You are much more than your emotions. Why do you have to die because of one emotion? That we have to know by heart: one emotion is something that comes, stays, and will go away, and if you know how to behave during that time, you are safe.

You might like to be in that physical position, and you might continue your mindful breathing, paying attention only to the belly: breathing in, rising; breathing out, falling. During the time of the storm you just take refuge in that solid cave. The root of your tree is here. I am sure that after ten or fifteen minutes the emotion will subside, and if you have succeeded once, then you will have faith in the practice, and you will no longer be afraid. You know that next time, when a strong emotion comes, you will do the same. But as I said, we should not wait until such a time comes to begin training ourselves. We have to train ourselves right now, every day practicing that kind of breathing in that position for a number of minutes. After something like three or four weeks, it will become a good habit, because the practice is enjoyable. When you practice like that you stop all your thinking, and you just enjoy your breathing and your sitting. And if the emotions come, you will remember to practice. It is quite possible to teach your child to do this, because your child can be the victim of strong emotions. In the beginning, when you see him or her in crisis, you can come close and sit down, saying: "Darling, take my hand; let's practice breathing in with Mommy: breathing in, my stomach is rising. Do you see your stomach rising? Breathing out, my stomach is falling. Let's do it again: in, out, rising, falling." In a few minutes your child will feel much better, because you have brought your mindfulness and your stability to support your child. Later on your child will be able to do it by herself alone. If you share the practice with the young people, the teenagers, the practice may save their lives. The practice is not difficult. It needs to be done every day, a little bit—that is all.

(Three bells)

(End of Dharma talk)

Recognizing Feelings  
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Today is the 25th of November 1999 and we are in the Lower Hamlet, we know that we have thirty seven days to live before the arrival of the year 2000. I like to visualize the 21st century as a beautiful hill. It would be wonderful to climb the hill together. To climb, is not to arrive, but just for the pleasure of climbing.

Suppose here is the year 2000 and here is 2100 and this must be 2050 and we have 37 days before the arrival at this point. To climb a hill together does not mean that we want to arrive as soon as possible at the year 2050, but just to enjoy the climbing, especially if we climb with the Sangha, people who know how to appreciate what is happening in the present moment because there are many wonders of life that are available in the here and the now and climbing is not to arrive, just to climb, just to enjoy climbing.

The practice of Buddhism is the practice of living deeply every moment of your daily life and the heart of the practice is mindfulness, because mindfulness is the capacity to be there, fully present in the here and the now. And when we have the energy of mindfulness we are capable of being there in the here and the now because that is a basic condition for touching deeply life. If you are distracted, if your mind is caught by your regret concerning the past, or the fear and uncertainty about the future, then you are not capable of being there fully alive in the here and the now. Therefore, you miss all the wonders of life that are available in that moment. That is why mindfulness is at the heart of Buddhist practice, you have to be mindful of every moment of your daily life.

When you drink your morning tea you should drink your tea in such a way that life should be possible in that moment. Peace, stability and joy be possible in that moment of tea drinking. You have to be concentrated, you have to be mindful of the tea in order for your tea drinking to be a real act of mindfulness. Only by drinking your tea in mindfulness that you can enjoy really the tea, you have to be totally present in that moment of drinking tea. You have to help the tea to reveal itself one hundred percent to you. You have to offer yourself one hundred percent for the tea and then you and the tea will become perfect in that moment. And the tea drinking can bring you a lot of happiness. That is simple, that is something you can do and that is the practice.

When you sit with your son or your daughter, sit in such a way that you be there one hundred percent of yourself, for him, for her. You will see that your son or your daughter will reveal himself or herself to you one hundred percent. You are available to him to her and she will be available to you one hundred percent. So, sit with your daughter in such a way that you are totally present and alive so that the moment of sitting together becomes an eternal moment. A moment of joy, of peace. If you are caught by your worries, by your regret, your fear, your anger you are not there and your daughter, your son is not there either.

When you look at the morning sky you look at the sky in such a way that the sky

will reveal to you one hundred percent of itself, and the basic condition is that you be there one hundred percent for the sky. I remember one day I received the visit of a reporter from San Francisco. He was there to interview me and I invited him to have tea with me in the garden. I proposed that he forget the interview, that he just enjoy the tea with me and I gave him instructions as to how to enjoy the tea, to be there fully for the tea and he liked it.

He had a taste of mindfulness practice, that is why the article he wrote is good. Because what is the use of interviewing if you don't know the practice? And then I walked with him to his car. Halfway I asked him to stop and I proposed to him to look up at the blue sky and, breathing in I am aware of the blue sky, breathing out I smile to the blue sky. And we stood there looking at the sky, breathing in and out together and smiling. And he told me, it is wonderful, it is the first time I look at the sky that way, very deep. The sky revealed itself to him entirely because he was there one hundred percent for the sky. Many of us have looked at the sky, have seen the sky of course, but not in that way. If our mindfulness is clear then the sky will reveal itself to us in such a deep way. So, drink your tea, sit with your son or daughter, look at the sky in such a way that life be possible in that moment. That is life.

The word Buddhism comes from the root Budh. Budh means to wake up, to be awake, to know what is going on. Budh means to know also, to know what is going on and the one who is awake, the one who is mindful knowing what is going on, that one we call him/her a Buddha. Buddha is not the name of a person, Buddha is just a word that describes someone who is really present, awake, knowing what is happening and that is why the energy that inhabits the Buddha is the energy of mindfulness. Mindfulness is the capacity of being truly present in the moment. And when we drink our tea perfectly in mindfulness we are a Buddha but because we don't practice we are not a full time Buddha. We are a Buddha for a few seconds and then we are non-Buddha again. That is why with the support of a community we can be more and more a Buddha.

Practicing mindfulness you will develop the capacity of being free, we cultivate our freedom and we know that freedom is the foundation of our happiness. There is no happiness without freedom. When we walk we can walk as a free person or as a slave, it depends on your way of walking. If you are caught by your anger, by your worry about the future, by your guilt concerning the past then you are not a free person, you walk but you are a slave. But if you are capable of making steps that are solid, peaceful, and if you enjoy every step that you make you are free from your worries, your fear, your regret and then you are a free person. And being a free person you can be very happy. So the amount of happiness you have depends on the amount of freedom you have in your heart. So, the practice of mindfulness, being there in the here and the now is really the practice of freedom. Not to allow yourself to be caught by the past, by the future, by your worries, by your anxieties. Free yourself in order to be there in the here and the now, to touch the wonders of life that are available in the here and the now, that is the practice of mindfulness.

During walking meditation, whether we walk alone or walk with a group of people we should learn how to walk as a free person. And as a free person you can enjoy every step you make. The earth that you tread becomes the Kingdom of God, becomes the Buddha Land. Whether it is hell or the Kingdom of God depends on us on our way of walking. If we are full of sorrow, of fear, of anger, of violence, the very ground

that we walk, that we tread becomes hell. But if we are a free person, if we have the energy of love, compassion, understanding and freedom in our heart and then the place will become the Kingdom of God, the Buddha Land. Everything depends on us, everything depends on our freedom and that is why practicing Buddhist meditation means to contemplate your freedom.

When you clean the floor, when you clean the bathroom or the kitchen you can do that as a slave or as a free person. As a slave you suffer but the other person while scrubbing the floor, cleaning the bathroom is very happy because she is a free person, it depends on your way. And mindfulness helps you to free yourself, and you can clean the bathroom with a lot of love and understanding, with a smile and that is an expression of your love and doing the work of cleaning the bathroom or the kitchen you get a lot of happiness. But if you are accompanied by your anger, discrimination and despair, cleaning the bathroom or the kitchen may become hard labor and we suffer a lot, every minute of doing it. That is why the practice of mindfulness can be described as the practice of freedom. Cultivating freedom. Where is the freedom? Is the freedom possible? Is there any freedom at all? The answer is yes! Freedom is possible and it comes from the practice of mindfulness. When you clean the bathroom with mindfulness, aware of every moment, aware that you are cleaning the bathroom, you are cultivating your freedom. But if you clean the bathroom in forgetfulness, being caught in your anger, your jealousy, in your worries and fear, there is no freedom at all.

Bell

When we practice walking meditation we invest one hundred percent of ourselves in the act of walking. When our body and our mind are fully concentrated on the act of making a step, the energy that helps us to do that is mindfulness and when mindfulness is there we are concentrated and the object of our concentration is the step we are making. Mindfulness plus concentration will bring forth the solidity, the freedom and the happiness. During the whole time we are walking we keep the energy of mindfulness alive in us, we are entering in the present moment. And when you look upon a person walking, sitting, lying down, cooking, watering the vegetable garden you can see if that person is anchored in the present moment or not.

In the here and the now. Our practice is to learn how to be anchored in the here and the now, all the time. Not to lose ourselves in forgetfulness. Forgetfulness means, we allow ourselves to be carried away by the past, by the future and so on. That is the way of cultivating freedom and when you do that, your brother, your sister around you will learn from you. She will go back to herself, he will go back to himself and walk like you do, breathe like you do, sit like you do and you become a bell of mindfulness for other people. Everyone is practicing freedom and we know that the amount of freedom determines the amount of happiness we have.

When you go back to the present moment you have a chance to recognize many of the wonders of life that are available in the present moment. You need to be in touch with them for your nourishment, for your healing and transformation because there are many things that are refreshing and healing and nourishing around us, and even



within us is a lot of goodness. When we go back to ourselves we recognize things that are not good, but if we continue to be there in us we will be able to touch the goodness within us. The same is true of the other person. When you focus your attention on him or her you may have the impression that person does not have enough goodness but that is your first impression only. If you really have enough mindfulness and concentration you will be able to discover that the person also has the potential to be a good person and if you know how to touch the goodness within her then she will be transformed into a very pleasant person.

If you live in a superficial way we can recognize only what is wrong, but we are not capable of realizing what is not wrong in us, in the other person and around us. We have the tendency to think that what is wrong is overwhelming and that is why we have a lot of depression and anger and fear but if we are capable of establishing ourselves firmly in the here and the now we will be able to recognize the positive elements that are still available in us and around us.

Suppose you get into a garden and you see a number of trees dying and you become depressed. You are not capable of noticing that there are still many trees that are healthy and beautiful. You should be able to notice the presence of these beautiful and healthy trees in order to enjoy them. And if you are supported by these beautiful, positive aspects of life you will be strong enough in order to take care of what is wrong, namely the trees that are dying. We protect what is not wrong and we try to help with what is wrong and that is our situation.

To allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the negative feeling when we touch what is wrong, is not a good thing to do. Therefore we should be able to be there in order to recognize the positive elements for our nourishment and healing. And we need a friend, a brother, a sister who practices in order to help us realize that. A good dharma brother, a good dharma sister will tell you that there are still many wonderful things around, and if you know how to be in touch with them you get the nourishment and healing that you need. Then you will be strong enough to take care of what is wrong.

There are things that are very much to our liking, but mindfulness helps us not to be possessive, attached to them. We know that the fresh breeze, the clean air, the beautiful sky are all wonderful and we can profit from them, and we need time. But you don't need to possess them, you don't need to be attached to them. You don't have to make them your own, preventing the other people to profit from them. Mindfulness is the kind of energy that can help you to identify and to recognize what is there, and also to keep you free.

You see something beautiful, you see someone beautiful, and if you have freedom in you will be capable of enjoying that beauty. Mindfulness will help you not to be attached to it, not to be a slave of it, not to try to possess that to make it yours, and to prevent others from enjoying it. Mindfulness has been described as the act of recognizing things as they are, mere recognition of what is there. When we see a rose blooming, we recognize there is a rose blooming. When we see that the rose is beautiful we say, the rose is beautiful, simple recognition of what is there. You do not try to be there to tie it to you, to possess it, to be attached

to it, or to run away from it, to suppress it or to try to discriminate against it.

When we do something negative your mindfulness will tell you, this is something negative. When you see something not beautiful, your mindfulness will help you to see, this is not so beautiful. Simple recognition of what is there, and how it is; that is the practice of mindfulness. Suppose you have a feeling of joy and breathing in you are aware of the feeling of joy in yourself. Mindfulness is the capacity of recognizing that joy is there in you; that is the practice. And mindfulness also helps you not to be a possessor of joy, trying to possess that joy, trying to make that joy exclusively yours. And that is why when that feeling of joy is no longer there you don't suffer.

When you have a feeling of non-joy arising in you, an unpleasant feeling, mindfulness will help you to recognize it as an unpleasant feeling. Mere recognition that it is an unpleasant feeling and you are still free from that feeling. Breathing in I know that a feeling is in me, breathing out I smile to the feeling. Breathing in I know that this feeling is unpleasant, breathing out I smile to the unpleasant feeling in me. You recognize the feeling and yet you are not a slave of that feeling, whether that feeling is pleasant or unpleasant. In both cases you remain a free person and as a free person you don't suffer much, that is the secret.

Even if you have a physical pain. If you have a physical pain mindfulness will help you to know, to be aware that a physical pain is there. Breathing in I know that there is a physical pain in me, breathing out I smile to the physical pain, and somehow you may remain a free person. If you try very hard to suppress the physical pain, you try to resist, your suffering is increased by ten times, twenty times because you are not free. If you are free you suffer very little, if you are not free you suffer ten times, twenty times more, that is why mindfulness can help. I repeat this, if it is a pleasant feeling, recognize it simply as a pleasant feeling, not to be attached to it, not try to possess it, not try to make it last longer, not try to make it eternal. Because if you do you will suffer, because everything is impermanent, including your pleasant feeling. So, whether the pleasant feeling is there or is not there, you are a free person and that is the key of your happiness.

If the unpleasant feeling is there, recognize it as being there, not trying to resist, not trying to combat, and then you are still a free person, you don't have to suffer much because an unpleasant feeling is also impermanent. Any feeling is impermanent, whether pleasant or unpleasant, and you are not touched by the unpleasant feeling, whether it is mental or physical. When you have physical pain you tend to worry a lot, you tend to resist a lot, you really want to hurry in order to remove the physical pain. And that kind of tension, that kind of resistance, that kind of attitude will make the physical pain in you double, triple, ten times, one hundred times more intense, that is why mindfulness practice is just to recognize it as it is, smiling to it. The practice of mindfulness is to maintain your freedom in order for you not to suffer.

The Buddha offers us this example. Suppose someone is struck by an arrow. He is

suffering. Suppose a second arrow comes and strikes exactly that same spot, now the pain will not be double, the pain can be ten times or fifty times more intense. So, if you have a mental or physical pain and you recognize it with freedom then you just suffer a little bit, but if you resist, if you are eager to suppress it, if you get angry, if you get a lot of worries and fear then your unpleasant feelings will be one hundred times more intense and you suffer a lot. And that is the second arrow. Never allow the second arrow to hit you, that is the practice. And only the freedom, with the practice of mindfulness, you can avoid the second arrow to come and hit you, simple recognition, mere recognition, is a very wonderful practice. And if you know how to practice mindfulness of relaxation, mindfulness of smiling, of breathing and then the feeling whether mental or physical will diminish and you know that if you are allowed to be touched by the healing, refreshing elements within and around you there will be a transformation and then the unpleasant feeling in you whether mental or physical will be relieved little by little. You know what to do and what not to do in order for the pain not to increase. And to know what to do and what not to do is the job of mindfulness because if you are mindful you know the situation well. If you are in the here and the now you know the situation better, and if you know the situation better you know what to do, and especially what not to do, in order not to make the situation worse. That is why mindfulness practice is very crucial in our daily life.

When we come to a practice center where people practice mindfulness, we have a chance to learn the art of mindful living. You have the chance to learn walking in mindfulness so you can enjoy every step you take. Walking in mindfulness is what all of us are supposed to do in Plum Village and the technique of walking is simple. Produce your true presence, body and mind united and make one step. Not to allow yourself to be carried away by the past or by the future, your projects, by your fear and just be there and enjoy making one step: with freedom, of course. Freedom from the past, freedom from the future, freedom from your projects, freedom from your resistance. Allow yourself to be there in the here and the now and make one step and you become a Buddha; a walking Buddha and if you are capable of making one step like that you know that you can make a second step and you can make also a third step. And your walking becomes very healing and transforming and you are supported by other brothers and sisters around you because they are practicing the same walking with freedom and enjoying every step they make. Walking as a free person. Walk like a free person and not a slave.

When we say the Kingdom of God is at hand, you have to say, are you ready to enter the Kingdom of God? The Kingdom of God is available, the Pure Land is available, it is there, it is only you who are not ready. You have no freedom, therefore the Kingdom of God is not yours, the Buddha Land is not yours. The Kingdom of God is only for those who are free and cultivating our freedom is your practice. Life is full of wonders, if you are free you come in touch with all these wonders, they all belong to the Kingdom of God. That is why, to allow yourself to be carried by your resistance, your fear, your anger is to run away on the Kingdom of God. Knowing that the Kingdom of God is there waiting for you with all the wonders, abandon all these kinds of worries and fears, and anger and resistance in breath, outbreath and produce your true presence, your freedom and with only one step you can step into the Kingdom of God.

I remember twenty years ago speaking in a church in the vicinity of Philadelphia, a church attended by the black people I made that declaration for the first time; you don't have to die in order to enter the Kingdom of God, in fact, you have to be

very alive. Free yourself, go back to the here and the now and with only one step you can already enter into the Kingdom of God. And during another retreat in Plum Village with Catholic nuns and monks, during the time we sit in the woods after walking meditation I turned to my friends and I said, "the Kingdom of God is now or never..." so be ready for it. And your practice is to walk in the Kingdom of God every day and if you are capable of doing it in Plum Village, you will be able to do it in Philadelphia, in New York City, Zurich, Bangkok and so on. So this is the place to train yourself to walk in the Kingdom of God. If you wait until you die it may be too late. And to me the Kingdom of God, the Buddha Land is available only in the here and the now; the message is very clear, otherwise we waste our life.

With our steps, with our mindful steps, we get anchored in the here and the now - the only address of life. The only real address of life: all the other addresses are fake. The real address of life is here and now, including the zip code. And if you ask the address of the Kingdom of God, the address of the Buddha, of Bodhisattvas I will tell you, the same address, here and now. Therefore our practice is to go back all the time to the here and the now in order to encounter true life and in order to encounter the Kingdom of God, the Buddha Land. And if your practice is strong, authentic, then you get it today, you don't need tomorrow, you can get it today. And the more you practice the more you enjoy, the practice is enjoyable. You don't practice for the future, you practice for the here and the now because the Dharma is described as not a matter of time, transcending time. The Dharma is for the here and the now.

With the practice of mindful breathing also you get anchored in the here and the now. Breathe in and out in such a way that you establish yourself always in the here and the now, while you eat, while you drink, while you wash dishes, while you sit with your son, your daughter, your brother, your sister. The practice of mindful breathing or mindful walking is very crucial, very basic in Plum Village.

The Buddha said, if you practice mindfulness in seven years you get your freedom, your emancipation. And then he said, you don't need seven years, one year may be enough if you practice mindfulness and then in one year you get your freedom. And after that he said, maybe you don't need one year, you need seven months and if you practice with all your heart in seven months you get your freedom, your emancipation. And then he looked at his disciples and he said, maybe you don't need seven months, you need seven days. Because if you get down to the practice, you practice with all your heart in seven days you get your freedom, it means your total happiness. And then he looked at them again and said, maybe you don't need seven days, you need one day, twenty four hours. You put all your strength, your heart into it and then in twenty four hours you can get your freedom and your happiness. And these words are recorded at the end of a discourse called Sattipattana Sutta, the Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. It is very meaningful, because every minute of the practice can already bring you joy and emancipation. It means that with only one step you can already get some freedom, with another step you get more freedom. One in breath you get some freedom, one out breath you can more freedom, you are cultivating your freedom all the time. because no happiness, no peace, no stability will be possible without freedom. So we can attribute, we can describe that the practice of mindfulness is the practice of freedom.

This morning we talked about the mindfulness trainings, the mindful manners as means to protect our freedom and to develop our freedom and now we are talking about the practice of breathing, of walking, of cleaning, as a practice of freedom also. Freedom is so precious for us, and that is why we come to the Sangha, we come to the practice center.

In our tradition, in our Zen tradition if you are in the meditation hall, in the Dharma hall you have to keep very quiet, very still. You are expected not to produce any noise. As soon as you arrive in the Dharma hall or in the meditation hall you sit down and you begin to practice mindful breathing. You don't talk, you don't do anything to create any noise. That is very important because the noise, even small noises, will harm the practice of other people. Out of respect for the Sangha we should be sitting very still and not making movements or other noises. This is in the tradition. It is very helpful and we have to learn how to do it. There should be no talking in the meditation hall, in the Dharma hall.

## *Taking Care of our Mental Formations and Perceptions*

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Dear Sangha, today is the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August, 1998, and we are in the Upper Hamlet for our Dharma talk in English.

This is a story for the young people, about the moon, because tomorrow night we are going to celebrate the welcoming of the moon. We will spend time singing and walking and performing and cake eating in the moonlight, in the Upper Hamlet. Every young person is invited, and all the less young people are also invited.

The children in my country used to look at the moon when it was full, and they would always see a tree in the moon, a tree with lots of leaves. The tree looks like a Banyan. If you look very carefully, you will see that there is a tree in the moon. And if you look more carefully, you will see that there is a man standing at the foot of the tree, and trying to reach the leaves. I think if you look hard, you will see that: a tree with a man. The children in Vietnam called that man *Cuoi*. Cuoi is someone who does not always tell the truth. Sometimes we say, "You lie like Cuoi." How come that Cuoi is there on the moon and does not live with us, among humans? There is a story that every child in Vietnam knows.

Cuoi was about twenty-one years old, and he was a logger. One day he went to the forest to chop wood, and suddenly he saw four baby tigers. He did not have enough compassion, so he used his axe and he struck the four baby tigers, and they all died. Suddenly he heard the voice of the mother tiger coming back, and he got so scared that he dropped his axe, and he climbed very quickly into a tree. What did he see? He saw the mother tiger crying, and suffering very much. But after that the mother tiger went to a nearby corner of the forest, and she took a number of leaves from a little tree. She chewed these leaves very carefully, mixing them with her saliva, and she tried to put it on the wounds of the baby tigers. About an hour and a half later, all the baby tigers came back to life. It was a miracle! Cuoi was near the top of the tree, and he saw everything. He was afraid that the mother tiger would kill him if he came down, so he stayed very still. He did not even dare to breathe deeply. He tried to breathe very smoothly, trying not to make any noise.

After seeing that the four baby tigers were okay, their mother thought that this was not a safe place for her children. So she took them, one by one, in her mouth, and she brought them to another area of the forest. The mother tiger loved her children very much. She could not use her paws, as she did not have hands, so she used her mouth to carry her babies one by one to a safe place. When the last baby tiger was gone, Cuoi began to come down, and he went home. He did not say anything to anyone, but he had an idea: he would like to bring back that little tree with the leaves that could heal serious wounds of the people, and plant that tree in his back yard.

About a week later he went to the forest, this time with tools that could help him to take the tree home. He spent the whole morning digging and digging, and finally he lifted the tree onto his shoulder, and he slowly went home. When he got home, he dug a very big hole in the back yard, and he planted that tree. He watered that tree every day, taking very good care of it. He was lucky-the tree survived, and began to grow beautifully.

One day, he wanted to try his medicinal tree, so he took a big stick, and he hit his dog. Cuoi was not a very kind or very gentle person. Now you know why no little boy in Vietnam has the name of Cuoi: because Cuoi is equivalent to "not kind," "not telling the truth." He hit his dog so hard that the dog was nearly dead, and a lot of blood came out. So he went to the back yard and took three or four leaves, and put them into his mouth and chewed them, and then used a kind of plaster, and put it on the wound of the dog. After just one hour the dog could stand up and run again. So he became a healer. If there was someone in the village who was sick, he would go to the house and offer to heal that person. In the beginning, no one believed in him, because he was not used to telling the truth. But finally, people said, "Oh, there is no harm; he does not charge anything." He said that he had a medicine that can heal in one or two hours, and so they let him try. And he helped so many people in the village, so he began to get a reputation as a good healer. But he kept his therapy very secret.

One day the daughter of the village head, the mayor, was very sick, and no doctor could help. The daughter was about to die. So the mayor announced that whomever could heal his daughter would get her as a wife. He would marry his daughter to anyone who could heal her sickness. Cuoi thought that this was his chance, so he came and offered his help. Of course, with that kind of medicinal tree, he could heal the daughter of the mayor, and finally he got permission to marry that beautiful lady.

You know already what happened-that beautiful lady was not happy, because Cuoi was not very kind, and he did not always tell the truth. I don't think that Cuoi practiced the Fourth Mindfulness Training. I don't think that Cuoi practiced the First Mindfulness Training very well. That is why he was not a happy person, he was grouchy, he was irritable; so the lady suffered quite a lot. Cuoi did not take good care of his wife, and he did not want to take care of anything in his home, except for one thing: the tree. He was very careful with the tree. He did not want any one, any animal, anything to come close to the tree. He told his wife never to throw anything dirty near the tree, and especially not to pour the dishwashing water close to the roots of the tree.

Cuoi's wife was intelligent, and she understood. She knew that she should not throw garbage or dirty water close to the tree; but he kept saying that almost every day, and that irritated her very much. One day, when he was hardly gone, she wanted to retaliate. She went into the back yard, and do you know what she did? She tried to pee on the tree. Out of anger, out of frustration with her husband. You know, things like that do happen from time to time. She was pouring all her anger and frustration on the tree by peeing on its roots.

Unfortunately, that day Cuoi forgot something, so he came back to his home, and he went to the back yard. He saw that the tree was becoming uprooted. The tree had shaken violently after the act committed by Cuoi's wife; the tree did not want to stay

there anymore, and it began to fly up. Cuoi saw that! He did not want to lose the tree, as it was his only means of survival. He screamed, and he jumped up and clung to the tree, trying to pull it down. But the tree was stronger than Cuoi. He had been a logger, and was very strong, but the tree was stronger. So the tree carried him higher and higher and higher, and when he was very high, he was so afraid of letting go, because if he let go he would drop down and die. So the tree carried him higher and higher until it reached the moon. So that is why every time you look at the moon you see a tree with a man underneath-Cuoi, who is still clinging to the tree. That is the belief of so many generations of Vietnamese children. Cuoi, because of his failure to practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings, was exiled from Earth, and had to live a life of seclusion on the moon. It's not very warm up there during the night, and not very fresh during the day. The tree survived okay, but Cuoi suffered a lot.

Tomorrow night, let us try to look up at the moon. If we have luck, there will be no clouds, and we can contemplate the moon, and practice looking. We might identify the medicine tree on the moon, and also Cuoi. Some people in Vietnam believe that each in autumn a few leaves from the tree fall down to the Earth, and whoever has the luck of finding a leaf can use it to heal his or her sickness. So, someday, if you see a leaf landing on you, be careful with it, because that leaf might have come from the tree on the moon.

When I was in Vietnam, I used to participate in Full Moon festivals of children in the countryside. I knew that everyone knew that story. That is why I offered to tell the next half of the story, which has not been told. This is the next half of the story; but it's not entirely complete, so after I tell you, please help me to finish it. It needs a final touch.

The United States of America and the Soviet Union wanted to work on a joint project, sending a few astronauts to the moon. I don't know what they wanted to do there, but they wanted to send four astronauts to the moon to do some sort of research: two Russians and two Americans. The project went well. A spacecraft carrying four astronauts was launched, and it landed on the moon. The astronauts began to do some research, but after a few days they noticed that their engine was flawed. There was something wrong with the spacecraft, and they discovered that they could not go home to the earth with that engine. So they wired America, they wired Russia, calling for help, because their supply of oxygen was good for only another five days. If Earth could not send another spacecraft in time, then they would have to die on the moon.

So the government of the United States, and the government of the Soviet Union were conversing with each other, trying to find ways to help the four astronauts. Scientists everywhere were using telephones to discuss how to rescue the four astronauts, and the news was printed in every newspaper, and announced every day on the radio. But no one, even the brightest scientists, could find a way to rescue the four men on the moon.

That day, a water buffalo boy in the countryside of Vietnam, when he brought his water buffaloes home, heard the news. He knew that everyone in the world was thinking hard about how to bring the four astronauts home. Suddenly he burst out laughing, and he said, "That's easy!" and people in his home asked: "How is it easy?"

He said, "I have an idea that will bring the four astronauts home, but I will not tell you. Please allow me to meet with the mayor, because I think this is going to work." At first they did not believe the little buffalo boy, because he was so young. But this buffalo boy was not named Cuoi, and he never lied to people. He was a very gentle young boy, so when he said that, the people agreed to arrange a meeting between him and the mayor of the village. This is what he proposed: he said that they should all go to, the Banyan tree, the medicine tree, and that they should climb it, and they should put their seatbelts on, so as to be sure not to fall out of the tree. After everything was ready, they had to begin to pee on the tree. And after that, the tree would uproot itself, and go up and bring the four astronauts back to the Earth.

That was his proposal. If the tree had gone to the moon in that way, it could return to the

Earth in the same way. But he did not say anything about Cuoi. I don't know whether he forgot, or whether he intentionally did not want to mention Cuoi, since that was also a chance for Cuoi to come home.

The young boy who made this proposal used to take care of water buffaloes. In Vietnam, many of us do not use tractors; many of us still use water buffaloes to pull a plow, to plow the field for planting rice. That way we don't need gasoline, we only need grass for the buffalo to eat. Because the water buffalo works very hard to help the farmers to plow the land, they are considered to be friends of humans, and we Vietnamese never eat the flesh of water buffalo, because we consider them to be our friends. It is like in India, where no one eats the flesh of the cows, because the cows are very helpful to every Indian citizen. Cows carry things, and help in several ways-even the cow dung is used. Everything from the cow can be used to help make daily life easier, and that is why our Indian friends never have the heart to eat the flesh of the cows. From time to time they use leather from cows, but that does not mean that they have to kill the cow in order to get the skin. No, they have to wait until the cow dies in order to get the skin to make into leather. So, if you go to India and you see that there are people who use leather products, that doesn't mean that they have killed the cows. So you have to look deeply to understand. In Vietnam the same thing is true with the water buffaloes. We know that the water buffaloes work very hard to pull the plow and help us, and that is why we take very good care of water buffaloes, and buffalo boys always consider the water buffaloes to be their friends.

I have had the opportunity to ride water buffaloes myself. It's very nice. One day I just lay down on the back of a water buffalo. It was warm and soft, and the buffalo knew the way home, and just brought me home like that. Many buffalo boys enjoy going home sitting on the back of their water buffalo, and they play the flute. Some of them use lotus leaves to shelter themselves from the sunshine, and go home that way, very beautifully.

So, the buffalo boys usually have three things. The first thing is a scythe to cut the grass to feed the buffaloes at home; the second thing is a flute, because they like to play flute while sitting on the back of the buffalo; and the third thing is a lotus leaf to shelter them from the hot sunshine. Those are their belongings. Don't think that the life of a water buffalo boy is hard. No, a buffalo boy can be very happy.

So, our young man who proposed the strategy to bring the four astronauts home was such a buffalo boy. After he had proposed the strategy, he continued to watch the moon each night. One day, he did not see the tree on the moon, and he did not see Cuoi, either. So he knew that the four astronauts had been rescued. He was so happy because he had been able to save the lives of four people, two Russians and two Americans. But a week later, he did not know why, looking at the moon, he saw the tree again, and he saw Cuoi again. He did not understand. When he looked at the moon one week ago, he did not see either the tree or Cuoi, so he believed that Cuoi was home on Earth again. But now, looking up at the moon, he saw that the tree was there, and Cuoi was there, as before. He just did not understand why.

This is why I think you have to help me, to shed light on the matter, to find out why Cuoi had returned to Earth, and why he didn't like it here, and why he wanted to go back to the moon. I think you need to learn a lot of psychology in order to understand. So maybe today, during your Dharma discussion, you will discuss why, after having been exiled from Earth for so many thousands of years, Cuoi did not want to stay with us, among humans. He must have found life here difficult, so he preferred to live alone on the moon. He knew the technique to get back to the moon. Tomorrow we will celebrate the coming of the moon together. We shall be able to look up at the moon together. But today, let us think a little bit about what happened to Mr. Cuoi, and his medicine tree.

When we hear the small bell, you may stand up and bow to the Sangha before you go out. (The children leave the meditation hall to go outside and play.)

(Bell)

*Quand je respire avec les feuilles des grands chenes, je deviens la fraicheur des feuilles, la joie, et la couleur verte.* "When I breathe with the leaves of the big oak trees, I become the freshness of these leaves, and the joy of their green color." In fact, this is possible, because perception is made of subject and object of perception, the perceiver and the perceived. When you are really in touch, you become what you touch with your perception. When you see peace, you become peace. When you touch stability, you become stability. The perceiver and the perceived are not separate entities. When you have a great thought, you become the greatness of that thought. When the object of your love is freedom, is stability, then you become freedom and stability. All of us know that the subject and the object of cognition are always together.

*Conscience, c'est toujours conscience de quelque chose.* "Consciousness is always consciousness of something." Mindfulness also; mindfulness is always mindfulness of something. When you have mindfulness of the blue sky, you become the blue sky, and the separation is removed.

*Quand je regarde le bleu du ciel, je deviens sa legerete, sa purete et sa limpidite.* "When I look at the blue sky, I become the lightness of the blue sky, I become the purity of the blue sky, and her clarity."

*Quand je danse avec le vent, je deviens sa liberte.* "When I dance with the wind, I become her liberty."

*Je ne suis pas ce moi limite par son manque d'energie, enferme dans ses habitudes negatives, egoistes, et etroite.* "I am not caught in this limited self and its lack of energy, and imprisoned in its negative habits, egoism, and narrowness."

*Je suis aussi ce que je vois, ce que j'entends, ce que je touche, ce que je respire, ce que je pense.* "I am also what I see, what I hear, what I touch, what I breathe, and what I think."

*Je deviens la douceur orange de la carotte, la fraicheur verte de la salade, quand je les mange.* "I become the orange sweetness of the carrots, the green freshness of the lettuce when I eat them."

*Je ne suis pas un moi separe, je suis ce donc je me nourris.* "I am not a separate self; I am what I feed myself." This is good, because you know that everything you consume becomes you, and with mindfulness you know what to consume and what not to consume. That is the practice of the Fifth Mindfulness Training.

*Seigneur Bouddha, puisse je toujours pratiquer l'ecoute profonde, et toujours finir par entendre ta voix qui penetre et traverse tout le cosmos.* "Lord Buddha, I wish I could always practice deep listening, that I could always listen to your voice that penetrates and goes through all the cosmos."

*Bien aime Avalokiteshvara, puisse tu grandir en moi, et aider, sauver, proteger, liberer, tous les etres qui souffrent.* "Beloved Avalokiteshvara, please grow up in me and help save, protect, protect and free all living beings who suffer."

*Je suis ton ardent disciple.* "I am a wholehearted disciple of yours."

*Pardon pour ma peur, mon manque de courage et d'energie.* "Please forgive my fear, my lack of courage and energy."

*Aidez-moi a me transformer afin que je deviens la continuite de ta main, de ta parole, de ton coeur, de ton esprit; et que je sois admis a ton cote, pour oeuvrer avec toi au bien-etre de tous les etres.* "Help me to transform, so that I become your continuation, the continuation of your hand, of your words, of your heart, and of your mind, that I could be admitted to your side, in order to help you in the work of bringing well being to all living beings."

There are moments when we have insight like that. There are moments when we can walk like that, when we can look like that, when we can touch like that, and these are moments of happiness. But the essential thing is to continue learning how to look like that, how to touch like that, how to think like that, how to walk like that. With the presence of the Sangha around us, that should be possible, because we are supported by the Sangha. The Sangha is a community of brothers and sisters who are dedicated to the practice, who are trying to do very much the same thing.

The practice is not just sitting, the practice is looking, the practice is thinking, the practice is touching, the practice is drinking,



eating, and so on. The quality of our practice depends on its content, namely the energy of mindfulness and concentration. Every act, every breath, every step, can help us to become more of our selves, to get more of that energy of mindfulness and concentration. When I join my palms to greet a child, or to greet an adult, that is not for the sake of being polite. That is my practice. I don't do it like a machine, because doing it like a machine would be the opposite of practice. In joining my two palms, I realize the oneness of body and mind. My left hand is like my body, my right hand is like my spirit, and they come together, and suddenly I arrive at the state of oneness of body and mind. The oneness of body and mind is the fruit of practice that you can get right away-you don't have to wait until eight days later, or a few months later.

We can achieve oneness of body and mind every moment: bringing back the mind to the body, suddenly you are there, fully present and fully alive. It is very quick. You are using your palms, you are making a flower with your two palms. It is beautiful in appearance, and it must be beautiful on the inside. When you do this, your mind and your body come together, and you produce your true presence. You come fully alive. It is a living being that is bowing to a child, or to a friend, and that is not for the sake of being polite. The Buddha said that we should not be caught in rituals. When you do something deeply, and authentically, that looks like a ritual. When you drink, you pick up a glass of water and you drink it; if you are truly concentrated in your act of drinking, it looks like a ritual. It is true that when you walk with all your being you invest one hundred percent of yourself into making a step. Mindfulness and concentration become a reality, and that step generates the energy of mindfulness and concentration that make life possible and deep and real. If you make a second step like that, the same kind of energy is generated and maintained. Walking like that, it looks like you are performing a rite. But in fact you are not performing-you are just living deeply every moment of your daily life.

Eating breakfast is the same. You can try to eat breakfast as a practice, and eating breakfast like that can be very powerful. It generates the energy of mindfulness and concentration that make life authentic during the time of eating breakfast. When you prepare breakfast, breakfast making can also be a practice. You can be really alive, fully present and very happy during breakfast making. It is no longer considered to be hard work, but a privilege. It depends on your way of looking. The cold water is available, the hot water is available, the soap is available, the kettle is available, the fire is available; everything is there in order to make your happiness a possibility. If you are not there, if you are caught in your worries and anger by the past and by the future, although you are making breakfast, you are not alive, you don't enjoy breakfast making. Breakfast making can be very nourishing. If someone sees you making breakfast that way, he or she will be impressed, and he or she will have a chance to go back to himself or herself and become alive. You are giving a Dharma talk with your way of making breakfast. So eating breakfast is the same.

The principle of the practice is simple: to bring our minds back to our bodies, to produce our true presence, to become fully alive, and there you are! Everything is happening under the light of mindfulness. In the Jewish tradition, and in the Christian tradition, we used to say "doing everything as though in the presence of God." God is witnessing everything that is happening to us. The kitchen is also a place for practice. If you are in the Jewish tradition, you know that to lay the table, to pour the milk, to cook the food is also the practice. You do everything as though in the presence of God. That is another kind of language, but pointing to the same reality.

Here, God is mindfulness and concentration. Everything that takes place is exposed to the light of mindfulness and concentration, and that energy of mindfulness and concentration is the essence of a Buddha. You know you have the capacity of being a Buddha, if you know how to cultivate that energy of concentration and mindfulness. You may call that energy the energy of God; you may call it the Holy Spirit. Many people in the Christian tradition speak in that way: the Holy Spirit is the energy of God, and it is in us. We can profit from it very well, and in fact we can help it to be generated, and enhance the quality of each minute of our daily lives.

The Buddha warned us about getting caught in rituals. We don't do things for the sake of being polite. All these rituals would be nothing if they were empty of life, namely empty of the energy of mindfulness and concentration. If the energy of mindfulness and concentration is there, you don't need any rituals, but anything that happens may look like a ritual. When the priest celebrates the Eucharist, breaking the bread and pouring the wine, he should not perform it only as a ritual. It is not the gesture and the words that create the miracle of the Eucharist-it is his capacity for being alive, of being present at that moment, it is his capacity for making the whole congregation wake up to being alive, because he breaks the bread in such a way that everyone becomes awake, becomes aware that this piece of bread contains life. That requires strong practice on the part of the priest. If he is not alive, if he is not present, if he does not have the power of mindfulness and concentration, he will not be able to create life in the congregation, in the church. That is why empty rituals do not mean anything. There should be the real thing in it; the real thing we can call the Holy Spirit. Any of us, priest or not priest, monk or not monk, our practice is to generate the Holy Spirit in us, namely the energy of concentration and mindfulness.

Mindfulness and concentration always bring insight, and insight is the liberating factor. We suffer because there is a lack of insight into our nature, and into the nature of reality. In the teaching of the Buddha, the processes-mindfulness, concentration and insight-are the essence of the practice. The energy of mindfulness contains within itself the energy of concentration; and concentration always contains the capacity of seeing deeply, bringing insight. Mindfulness, concentration and insight are the heart, the essence of our practice. So when you practice walking with your feet, each step you make should have mindfulness, concentration and insight. If you do this, you can touch the earth, you become one with the earth, and you dissipate fear and loneliness. There is no other way. The way is the way of mindfulness, concentration and insight. When you breathe you practice the same way: every breath you take generates mindfulness, concentration and insight. The liberating factor is insight. The ultimate aim of the practice is the insight that liberates us from our fear, our ignorance, our loneliness, and our despair. It is that insight that helps us to penetrate deeply into the nature of birth and no-death, the nature of interbeing. The cream of the Buddhist practice is to touch our true nature of no birth and no death, no separation. We can do that just by very simple practices, breathing in and breathing out, by making a step, by looking, by touching.

(Bell)

The Mindfulness Trainings should be looked upon as the practice of mindfulness, and not as a set of rules. If you look at them as a set of rules, you are caught by what the Buddha described as the attachment to rituals and rules, and this is not a good thing in Buddhism. You should not be a victim of rules and rituals. So be careful when you study and practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings. Consider them to be an art of mindful living, and not something imposed on you to restrict your freedom. In fact the practice of the Five Mindfulness Trainings will help you to gain more freedom every day.

The monastics have their own set of Five Mindfulness Trainings. Do you know that the monks have 250 mindfulness trainings? And also they have twenty-nine chapters of Mindful Manners. It may be helpful to study the monastic codes. It can help us to understand our practice of the Five Mindfulness Trainings. When a monk or a nun walks, he or she is not supposed to talk, because how can you practice walking deeply, generating mindfulness and concentration, if you talk at the same time? So you may have noticed that when a monk talks, he stops. One thing at a time. He is concentrated on what he is talking about, he is concentrated on what he is listening to, and after that he resumes his walking. Every step he makes should generate mindfulness and concentration. His insight depends on that practice.

Mindfulness Trainings help to protect you, and you may like to read a book about the Ten Mindfulness Trainings of a novice monk or nun, and the twenty-nine chapters of Mindful Manners. If a novice abides by that practice, he will look beautiful as a monk or nun, because mindfulness is his or her adornment. If you live mindfully in every minute of your life, you become a beautiful person, and the energy of mindfulness that you produce protects you and protects the people around you. When you see a monk sitting with a young lady out of the sight of the Sangha, you know that he is not practicing Mindful Manners. It is inscribed in the monastic code that that is one of the things that you should not do. That is to protect you and to protect that lady. You can sit and talk to a lady, but where the Sangha can see you. That is not a restriction, that is a practice to protect you and to protect the Sangha, because if one member of the monastic Sangha is destroyed, the pain will be felt by the whole monastic Sangha. And I think it is good for the lay community to understand that, in order to help protect the monastics at the same time. Everything should be looked upon as the practice of mindfulness, and mindfulness practice is an art, the art of self-protection and the protection of the world around us, including the world of animals, vegetables and minerals. That is why the energy of mindfulness is our savior, and it is our task to generate that energy every day. The collective energy of mindfulness will really be the savior of our situation, of our families.

The day before yesterday we spoke about eight exercises of mindful breathing, and many of you have the book *La Respiration Essentielle, Breathe! You are Alive*, with commentaries on the exercises. We know that there are four areas of mindfulness. The four areas where mindfulness has to penetrate, in order for us to be protected, for joy to be nourished, for pain to be transformed, and for insight to be obtained. These are called the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. We know that mindfulness is always mindfulness of something.

The First Foundation of Mindfulness is mindfulness of the body in the body, according to the way the Buddha spoke. "Mindfulness of the body in the body" means that when you bring mindfulness into your body, mindfulness becomes the body. Mindfulness is not an outside observer anymore. Mindfulness becomes the body, and the body becomes mindfulness. When mother embraces child, mother becomes child, and child becomes mother. That is why the Buddha used the expression "mindfulness of the body in the body." In true Buddhist meditation, the subject and the object of meditation no longer exist as separate entities. In fact, that distinction is removed. So when you generate the energy of mindfulness, embracing your breathing, embracing your body, that means mindfulness of the body in the body. Mindfulness is not an outsider observing, but it is the body. The body becomes the object of mindfulness and the subject of mindfulness at the same time.

It is as nuclear scientists in our day say: in order to understand an elementary particle, in order to really enter into the world of the infinitely small, you have to become a participant, and not an observer anymore. In India they use this example to illustrate the fact: a grain of salt would like to know how salty the water of the ocean is. How can a grain of salt understand the degree of salinity of the ocean water? The only way is for the grain of salt to jump into the ocean, and the understanding will be perfect. The separation between object of understanding and subject of understanding is no longer there. In our time, nuclear scientists have begun to see that. That is why they say that in order to really understand the world of the elementary particle, you have to stop being an observer, you have to become a participant.

So, the First Foundation of Mindfulness is our body, and the Second Foundation of Mindfulness is our feelings. And the third area of mindfulness is the mind, namely the mental formations. The Buddha offered us four exercises on mindful breathing to take care of our body. The second area of mindfulness is the feelings, where he also offered four other exercises of mindfulness related to mindful breathing. The third area is the mind. Mind here should be understood as all the mental formations. For the mental formations he also proposed four exercises on mindfulness of mindful breathing.

The fourth foundation of mindfulness, the fourth area that mindfulness has to enter and transform, is the realm of perception. In the sutra it is described as "the objects of mind," and we can understand this as perception. He also proposed four exercises on mindful breathing, so that we can penetrate, embrace and look deeply into the object of our perception, so that we can get the insight that will liberate us from our delusion, our suffering.

So, there are four areas. You understand what the body is, you understand what the feelings are, you understand what the objects of mind are—mountains, river, birds, blue sky, house, stream, children, animals—everything is the object of your perception, and we have four exercises of mindful breathing in order to inquire about the true nature of all these things, including ourselves. In a way, "body" is part of the object of mind, feelings also are part of the object of our mind, and mental formations also become part of the object of our mind, because we can always inquire about the nature of our body, our feelings, or our mind, or other things. But maybe you have not understood what mind is, what mental formations are. "Mental

formations" is a technical term. The Sanskrit word is *Samskara*.

Formation is the term that points to everything that is there, everything that manifests itself according to the law of causes and effects. For example, this sheet of paper is a formation, because many elements have come together to make this exist: the sunshine, the trees, the clouds, the factory, the workers in the factory, and many more elements have come together to produce this sheet of paper, so this sheet of paper is a formation. That flower is a formation. If you look deeply into the flower you see the sunshine. Without sunshine there would be no flower. There is a cloud in it, there are the minerals in the earth, the compost, the gardener, many elements have come together to make the flower manifest. So the flower is a formation, but that is a physical formation. Our anger is a formation, but it is a mental formation. Our fear, our depression, are mental formations. Many elements have come together to make that formation possible. In my tradition of Buddhism we learned that there are fifty-one categories of mental formations-your fear, your despair, your love, your compassion, your mindfulness. Mindfulness is one of the fifty-one categories of mental formations. So you have the mental formation of mindfulness. That is good news, because if you know how to practice every day, then mindfulness can be generated as an energy, to do the work of recognizing, embracing, transforming and healing. Mindfulness is considered to be the Buddha nature in us, and if you know how to cultivate it, the energy of understanding and loving and forgiveness will be born from this kind of practice.

Mental formations may be negative or positive. When you bring mindfulness to the area of mental formations, you recognize them as such. If it is a positive mental formation, and you recognize it as a positive mental formation, your capacity to release, your capacity to be compassionate, your capacity of understanding, your capacity of being joyful, all these are positive mental formations that exist in you. They may be weaker or stronger, but they do exist in you. Sometimes you believe that they don't exist, but that is not right. They may not be strong, they may be covered by many layers of suffering, but they do exist. Your capacity of being enlightened, of being loving, of being forgiving, they are always there in your consciousness, in the form of seeds, *semences*.

Our consciousness may be described as having two layers, or two parts. The upper part is mind consciousness, *le mental*; and underneath there is the store consciousness, which may be translated as *le trefonds*. Store consciousness is like the basement of your house, and mind consciousness is like the living room. In the store consciousness all the fifty-one mental formations are preserved in the form of seeds, *bija* in Sanskrit. They are always there. You may believe that you are not capable of loving, you are afraid of love. You believe that you don't have the capacity of loving, but that is not true. It is always there. You have not been practicing loving, you have not been practicing watering the seed of love, and it seems difficult to love. But if you know how to practice watering the seed of love in you every day, the seed will grow, and you need only to touch it lightly, and it will become a zone of energy called love, manifested in the upper level of your consciousness.

The seed of love, the seed of fear, the seed of forgiveness, the seed of hatred, every time it is touched, will manifest itself in this upper level in the form of energy. If you are mindful, you can recognize it, and now you can call it a mental formation. You can identify it by calling it by its true name. So when you have anger manifested in you, if you know how to breathe in and breathe out and become aware of the fact that the seed of anger has manifested in you, that is mindfulness of anger. "Breathing in, I know that anger is in me. Breathing out, I am embracing my anger." It is as if you touch the seed of mindfulness down here, and invite it up to become another zone of energy, embracing the first zone of energy.

As a practitioner, you never leave negative energy alone, dominating, in your living room. You have to do something-you have to practice. And the practice is to use your mindful in-breath and out-breath, to use your steps, in order to invite the seed of mindfulness to manifest, and then you have energy number two. Using the energy number two, you embrace the energy number one. Mindfulness of anger is what you practice when anger manifests. The practice is just embracing, recognizing, and not fighting, because you know that anger is you, mindfulness is you, and you should not transform yourself into a battlefield. This is not intelligent practice. This is not Buddhist practice, because Buddhist practice is based on the insight of non-duality. This and this both share the same reality. If you have the intention to fight, to repress, to destroy, you transform yourself into a battlefield. That is not recommended.

The idea that anger is evil, that mindfulness is good, and that you should use the good to fight evil, that is not Buddhist. You have to use mindfulness, and embrace your anger in the most tender way possible, like a mother embracing her suffering baby: "Darling, I am here for you. Don't worry, I will take good care of you." Not only do you deal with your anger in that way, but also you deal with your fear, your jealousy and all kinds of suffering in that way. You have to attend to your pain, you have to provide the energy of mindfulness to take care of the blocks of pain in you when they manifest. If you know how to do that, you get relief after ten or fifteen minutes...sometimes longer, but continue the practice of mindful breathing, mindful walking, and other kinds of practice.

Continue to recognize and embrace whatever is there, and you will get relief. If you continue, you may get an insight into its nature, and that insight will be able to transform it. But after five or ten minutes of embracing it, it may go down again into the seed, and you feel much better. But that does not mean that anger has been eliminated from you. Anger has just ceased to be a zone of energy up here, and it has returned to its initial form: a seed. And next time that you or someone else comes and waters it, it will be back again. But one thing is sure: after having been embraced by mindfulness for a few minutes, ten or fifteen minutes, it will go down a little bit weaker. It will always be like that. After taking a bath of mindfulness, your pain and sorrow will be lessened a little bit when they become a seed. If you know how to do it, next time that they manifest you continue the same practice: "My dear little anger, I know you are there, I will take care of you." You are always ready for it. Don't try to suppress it, allow it to come up without fear, because you already have the energy of mindfulness that you have cultivated during the practice.

We know that there are fifty-one categories of mental formations, and we should know also that feelings are one of the fifty-one categories. Feeling is a mental formation, and perception is also a mental formation. But because feelings and perceptions are so important as objects of the practice, the Buddha has singled them out as categories. Therefore, in this category of mind,

you have forty-nine mental formations left. When I was a novice I had to learn by heart all the fifty-one mental formations. I could recite them to you now, in Vietnamese.

So every time a mental formation manifests itself in the upper level of your consciousness, you have to be able to call a mental formation by its true name. You say: "Dear mental formation, I know that you are there, and I will take good care of you." We can do that only if we have enough of that energy called mindfulness. Mindfulness is one of the fifty-one categories.

(Bell)

This Dharma talk is to initiate you into the practice of taking care of your mental formations, and your perceptions. We should continue to learn, and the book I recommended to you is very small, but it can help in the beginning: Breathe! You are Alive, *La Respiration Essentielle*. It is available in Italian and German and many other languages.

For this category, the first exercise, namely the mind: "Experiencing the mental formation, I breathe in; experiencing the mental formation, I breathe out." It means "Recognizing the mental formation, embracing the mental formation I breathe in. Recognizing and embracing the mental formation, I breathe out." You have to recognize it by its true name, whether that is joy, or forgiveness, or hope, or fear, you have to recognize it as it is. Don't try to fight, don't try to get attached to it, just recognize it and embrace it, and become one with it. Become one with it, but without losing yourself in it, because mindfulness is always there. Mindfulness is the protector. Without mindfulness you might get lost in your fear or your anger. But if mindfulness continues to be generated, then you'll never get lost, and mindfulness will continue to penetrate deeply into the zone of energy called fear or anger, and will bring you relief and transformation.

So, the ninth exercise is experiencing the mental formation: "I breathe in, I breathe out." The tenth is gladdening: "Gladdening the mental formation I breathe in, I breathe out." As I understand the sutra, in the light of my own practice, these two exercises are dealing with the positive mental formations that exist in us. Sometimes we ignore the existence of these wonderful positive mental formations in us, so that we don't have confidence in our own selves. That is a complex. We think that we are not worth anything, that the good, the true and the beautiful should be sought from outside, that there is nothing true and beautiful and good in us. This ninth exercise is to change that situation, because if you believe that you are not worth anything, then you suffer; you don't have trust within yourself, you always try to find something outside of yourself. If you have confidence within yourself, you wouldn't need things like hypocrisy, or cosmetics. The use of cosmetics proves that you have no confidence in yourself, in your beauty, in your truth, in your goodness. You want to deceive the other into thinking that you are beautiful, you are good, you are true, so you use cosmetics on hypocrisy. Whether in the realm of the world, or in the spiritual realm, that happens. But the Buddha said that you don't have to use cosmetics, you don't have to be a hypocrite, because you do possess the good, the true and the beautiful. You have to go home to yourself and rediscover these things. That is the Buddha nature in us, the baby Buddha existing in us. And that is the wonderful message of the Buddha. You are a Buddha-to-be. Don't despise yourself.

There is a bodhisattva whose name is Thuong Bat Khinh, "Never Disparaging." His job is only to go to people and say, "I do not underestimate you, sir; I do not underestimate you, ma'am, because you are a Buddha-to-be." His work is only that, to bring the message of hope and self-respect to people so that they will not be victims of their lack of confidence, victims of low self-esteem. People sometimes threw rocks or tomatoes at that bodhisattva, because they thought he was making fun of them; but he was just trying to bring them the truth that the beautiful, the good and the true do exist, within each of us.

With our efforts of looking deeply, with the help of a brother or a sister in the Dharma, we should be able to identify the positive mental formations within us, in the form of seeds. That is practice in the context of a Sangha. If you are Dharma brother or a Dharma sister to someone, you try to help her to see her own goodness, her own capacity, in order that she will not be a victim of low self-esteem. You can be the therapist, because you are a brother or a sister in the Dharma.

So it is beneficial to identify the good mental formation, to recognize it as existing, to embrace it, and to help it to grow. It's like when you go to your garden, and you know that some trees are dying, and so you are overwhelmed by sorrow from the sight of these trees dying; but you completely ignore that there many beautiful trees still living in your garden. You need this practice to know that there are many beautiful trees there. You need a brother or a sister to remind you that these beautiful trees still exist. This is the practice of embracing the positive, and nourishing the positive, and bringing joy and hope as elements of nourishment. The Buddha is always compassionate. He wants us be fed, to be nourished with positive things that already exist, and therefore in this area of practice, he wants us to recognize the positive seeds, to embrace them, and to make them grow. With the practice of mindfulness and concentration, you bring joy and happiness as nourishment to yourself. It is very important, because you are going to continue.

The next exercise is to recognize and embrace a negative mental formation:

"Concentrating on the mental formation, I breathe in." Your depression, your fear, the conflict within yourself, the conflict between two tendencies, two mental formations within yourself, your jealousy, your despair-all these belong to the category of negative mental formations. Don't be afraid of them. If they want to come up, allow them to come up, and just embrace them. Bring all your energy back to make mindfulness strong, and just embrace them. I do this a lot.

Thirty years ago in Vietnam, all the destruction and death had sown in me many seeds of suffering and pain. There were nights when I stayed awake, I could not sleep, and my practice was to follow my mindful breathing, and embrace the pain, embrace my people, embrace my country, embrace the earth. That is the only practice. By doing so, you do not allow the pain and sorrow to overwhelm you, to destroy you. In the lying position, or in the sitting position, you continue to generate the energy of the Buddha, and embrace it, and you can survive these difficult moments, and you can transform them. Learn the art. Cultivate mindfulness. Be brave in encountering your own suffering, with all your tenderness, all your concentration. And if you need it, a brother or a sister in the Dharma can come and help you to do it. As a practitioner, he also has some amount of

mindfulness, she also has some amount of mindfulness. She can sit next to you and say, "Dear sister, be sure that I am here, bringing my support to you. Be brave, embrace your pain, I am here for you." With that support you are able to do the work.

The twelfth exercise: "Liberating the mental formation, I breathe in and I breathe out." When you embrace your pain with concentration, you have the opportunity to look deeply into the nature of that pain, that sorrow. Mindfulness, concentration and insight will bring relief. Insight will liberate you from that pain. Insight is the flower that grows on the tree of looking deeply, when you bring mindfulness into the realm of perceptions. That is the focus of the last set of four exercises offered by the Buddha, so that we can know how to look deeply into the nature of reality and get emancipated from the suffering, the illusions, the wrong perceptions that are at the base of your suffering.

This is the last Foundation of Mindfulness: contemplation of perceptions in the perceptions, or contemplation of the objects of mind in the objects of mind. You may ask the question: "Where is the fifth?" because last time we have seen that our person is made of five elements, yet here there are only four. Here is the answer: (Thay draws on the board.) We reproduce the orange of the day before yesterday, and the five sections of the orange: form (body), feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness. Form is here, the first foundation of mindfulness. Feeling is here, the second foundation of mindfulness. Mental formations are here, as the third foundation of mindfulness. Perception is here, the fourth foundation of mindfulness. How about consciousness? The answer is that consciousness is the ground of all mental formations. Feelings is one mental formation, perception is another mental formation, there is forty-nine other mental formations. And all of these mental formations are a manifestation of consciousness. When you contemplate all of these fifty-one mental formations, you are already contemplating consciousness, because the consciousness is like the water, and all these things are the waves. If you look deeply into the wave, you are already touching the water, you are already seeing the water. That is why feelings, perceptions and mental formations are manifestations of consciousness. And that is why all five sections of the orange, the five elements that make up our persons, are entirely covered by the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. The process is very scientific, and this is to serve as instrument for you to begin the practice.

The thirteenth exercise: "Contemplating impermanence, I breathe in." The essence of Buddhist meditation is *Vipashyana* (*Vipassana* in Pali). That means looking deeply into the nature of things in order to understand the true nature of reality, the true nature of your joy and suffering. What does it mean to look deeply? Looking deeply is to use all your mindfulness, all your concentration to inquire about the reality that is in front of you, the object of your inquiry. The Buddha has provided us many keys, many instruments to enable us to succeed in the work of looking deeply. The first instrument is called impermanence. You look in such a way that you can discover the impermanent nature of everything that is.

Intellectually, we all know that everything is impermanent, that everything is changing, but that is only the intellect. I am to grow old. The person with whom I live, tomorrow will be old, or may go away. That is part of impermanence. We know it intellectually, but practically we live as if we don't know that things are impermanent. If you really had the insight of impermanence, you would not live like that. You would be much wiser. You speak as if that person is going to be like that for one thousand years, and you speak as if you are going to be like this for another one thousand years, but this is not true. We are not the same in two consecutive moments. If you really have the insight of impermanence, you will be able to release everything that is not essential, and you will be able to live deeply every moment of your daily life. We are caught by many, many things that are not essential, and we lose our lives just because of that. We are not capable of releasing, and that is why there is no freedom and no happiness. When you know that things are impermanent, you will be able to recognize what is really essential for your life and your happiness, and you will have the courage to let go of other things. When you have the insight of impermanence, you will not wait. You will do anything you can do today to make the person you love happy. Because you don't have that insight, that is why you don't do it. And then one day she is no longer there, and you cry, and you repent: "While she was alive I did not do that; now I regret it."

Impermanence brings a lot of insight, and you become very wise and you know how to live in such a way that happiness can be possible in the here and the now. I have a short poem that I have shared with so many people, and they like to use it when they get angry at the other person, the person that they love the most.

*Getting angry at each other in the ultimate dimension.*

*We should only close our eyes and look into the future.*

*In about one hundred years from now,*

*Where will you be, and where shall I be?*

That is the insight of impermanence. When you get angry at her or at him, you want to punish him or her to get relief. That is a natural tendency. But if you just close your eyes and visualize yourself and your beloved one three hundred years from now, you will get the insight of impermanence. Just one in-breath and one out-breath, that is enough for you to get the insight. When you open your eyes, you only want to do one thing. That is to open your arms and hug that person. That is the only thing worth doing, to cherish her presence, because of impermanence. Because you are unaware of the nature of impermanence in everything, you get angry.

(Bell)

We suffer not because things are impermanent. We suffer because things are impermanent, but we don't know that they are impermanent. This is very important. That is why it is very helpful to practice mindful breathing, in order to bring the insight of impermanence to ourselves, and to keep it alive. Then we know what to do and what not to do to make life more pleasant. Looking into a flower, looking into a cloud, looking into a living being, you touch the nature of impermanence. How important is impermanence? Without impermanence, nothing can be possible. Don't complain about impermanence. If things are not

impermanent, how could a grain of corn become a corn plant? How could your child grow up? So impermanence is the ground of life. But in spite of the fact that things are impermanent, we are not aware of that nature of impermanence in life. So when you practice looking deeply into things, you should discover the nature of impermanence, and you should make it into a living insight. A living insight means that you carry it in every minute of your life, and then you become a wise man, a wise woman, and you get rid of so much of your pain and sorrow and delusion.

Impermanence in the teaching of the Buddha also means interbeing, non-self. Because things change every moment, nothing can remain the same in two consecutive moments. There are no permanent entities; there is no permanent self. You have no permanent self. A flower is made only of non-flower elements. You are made of entirely non-you elements. That is the truth. You are made of ancestors, air, water, education, sunshine, clouds, and so on. You are a formation. You are beautiful, but you are a formation. Every formation is impermanent. That sentence is repeated many times over by the Buddha: all formations are impermanent. We should grasp it, we should touch it with our experience, and not just our intellect.

A flower cannot be by itself alone, because it has no separate self. A flower can only inter-be with the sunshine, with the clouds, with the earth. If you remove the element sunshine from the flower, the flower will collapse. If you remove the element cloud, meaning water, from the flower, the flower will collapse. So a flower is full of everything. Everything in the cosmos can be found in the flower: sunshine, clouds, minerals, earth, time, space, humans, everything. Only one thing is lacking in the flower—that is a separate existence, a separate self. Now you understand what is meant by "non-self."

Non-self does not mean non-existing; non-self means you don't have a separate existence, like the flower. A flower is there, full of the whole cosmos, but not having a separate entity. There is no such thing as permanent and separate. There's nothing that can be permanent, that can be separate. Everything is impermanent, everything has the nature of interbeing. Nothing can be by itself alone, everything has to inter-be with everything else. The Buddha expressed that reality in very, very simple terms: "This is, because that is." If you had asked about the Buddhist teaching on Genesis, about how the world has come to be, the Buddha would have said: "This is, because that is." That is the law of interbeing, the law of interdependent origination, the law of no self. "No self" does not mean non-existing. Everything is, in a wonderful way, but everything is a formation.

When you practice embracing the object of your perception, whether that is a flower, or a cloud, or your anger, or a person, you know that all of these are formations, and that all formations are impermanent. But if you look more deeply, impermanence and interbeing open to you the dimension called Nirvana. Nirvana is the nature of no-birth and no-death. How can nirvana go along with impermanence and non-self? The answer is that it is exactly because things are impermanent and without a separate self that their nature is the nature of Nirvana. It means the nature of no-birth and no-death. Look at the cloud. The cloud is impermanent—it can be transformed into rain at any moment. And yet you cannot reduce a cloud to nothingness. A cloud can never die. Do you think that a cloud can die? To die means that from something you suddenly become nothing, from someone you suddenly become no one at all. That is our idea of death. This meditation of the Buddha looks into that notion of death. Death is not a reality, because nothing can become nothingness. A sheet of paper, when you try to destroy it, when you burn it, you cannot reduce it into nothingness. It will become smoke, it will become heat, and it will become ash. And the smoke will join a cloud, the ash will join the earth, and the heat will join human beings and other beings, and penetrate into the cosmos. If you like, you can follow the journey of the sheet of paper.

So it is not possible to reduce anyone or anything into nothingness. The nature of this sheet of paper is no-death. When the cloud is struck by a wave of cold air, it becomes the rain, but the cloud is not scared. In the cloud there is the wisdom that being a cloud floating in the blue sky is wonderful, but being rain falling on the field, on the ocean, is also something wonderful. You cannot reduce the cloud into nothingness. Annihilation is not a reality, it's not possible. Annihilation, non-being, is the opposite of permanence. Permanence is only an idea, and annihilation is another idea, another extreme. A separate and permanent self is one extreme; and nothingness, non-being, annihilation is another extreme. Reality transcends these two extremes. That is called the Middle Way.

The Middle Way, the *Madhyamika* way, is the way of transcending pairs of opposites, including the notion of birth and the notion of death. In our minds, to be born means that from nothing you suddenly become something, from no one you suddenly become some one. But that is not possible. Before the sheet of paper was born, was it nothing? No, it was a tree, it was the sunshine, it was the rain. If you look deeply into the sheet of paper, you will identify the rain that helped the trees to grow, you will identify the chlorophyll, you will identify the gases in the air, you will identify the cloud, and you will identify the sunshine. So it was not really born. You begin to see that the sheet of paper is only a moment of continuation, the moment of your birth is only a moment of continuation, you have been there before you were born, in one form or another. Before the cloud was born, it was there already in the form of the ocean, the heat helped the water in the ocean to become a cloud. So its former life was water, and in its present life it is a cloud. Maybe the next life will be snow, or ice, or rain.

Every moment of transformation is a continuation, and on your birthday it makes sense to sing: "Happy Continuation Day to You." That can apply also for the moment of your so-called death. That is also a moment of continuation. The process of continuation takes place every moment. I'm very mindful that, when in the process of teaching my students, monks, nuns and lay people, I am re-born every minute in them. My job is to transmit my joy, my insight, to them. That is done in every minute, not by Dharma talks, but by living my life: walking, sitting, eating, talking, smiling are acts of transmission. My students have carried me in them. Someone might like to shoot me down, as they have shot Martin Luther King, or Gandhi. They thought they could reduce these men to nothingness, but you know that these two people continue among us, stronger than ever. They are reborn. They lived their lives, and they get reborn every moment. It is not easy to follow their journey—just as when you burn the sheet of paper, it's very hard to follow its journey. You have to go to the sky to observe the clouds, you have to go to the cosmos to observe the heat, you have to go to the earth to observe the ash, and in a few months the sheet of paper might be seen in the form of a tiny flower in the grass. Tomorrow you may get a drop of rain on your head, and that may have been the sheet of paper that you burned today. "Hello there again!" And you may see a little flower in the grass in a few months, and

that is a continuation of the sheet of paper that you burned today.

In Zen circles, sometimes you may be offered a subject of meditation such as: "Disciple, tell me how you looked before the birth of your grandmother?" That is a very nice invitation for you to go on a journey to look for yourself, for your nature, the true nature of no-birth and no-death. The true nature of a cloud is the nature of no-birth and no-death, no beginning and no end. That nature goes by the name of "Nirvana." Nirvana means extinction; extinction means the extinction of all notions. First of all, the extinction of all notions like birth and death, being and non-being, permanence and annihilation—all pairs of opposites are erased by the insight of Nirvana. Your true nature is the nature of no-birth and no-death. You may call it God if you like, but in the Buddhist terminology, it is Nirvana, the extinction of all notions. When conditions are sufficient and something manifests, you call it existing, being. And if some condition is lacking, and that something hides itself away, it does not manifest anymore, you call it non-existing, no being. But the reality transcends both being and non-being.

Metaphysics is described as the "science of being," the study of being. *L'Etre entend qu'etre*. But in the light of the Buddhist teaching, being is just an idea, and non-being is just another idea. Reality is free from these two notions. I used to say, "To be, or not to be, that is **not** the question." That is why the practice of looking deeply can help us to touch the nature of no-birth and no-death, and help us to transcend all kinds of fear, especially fear of non-being. There are people who are afraid of being. They try to kill themselves. There are people who are afraid of non-being. All these fears, all these kinds of craving can be removed by the insight of Nirvana.

The Buddha said that Nirvana can be touched with your own body. Nirvana is in the here and the now. If you look into a wave, you can see the water. The wave can live her life as a wave, of course, but the wave can live the life of water at the same time. As a wave, she is supposed to be born, and to die, to be high, or to be low, to be more or less beautiful than other waves. But if she touches the water within herself, and recognizes that she is water at the same time, then she is no longer afraid of coming up, going down, birth and death, being more or less beautiful, because she knows that she "inter-is" with every other wave, and with the water. So water is the ultimate dimension of reality, and wave is the historical dimension of reality. But the two dimensions are not separated; if you throw away the wave, you won't have any water left; and if you throw away the water, you won't have a wave. That is why, touching the wave deeply, you touch water, and when you touch reality in its nature of impermanence and interbeing, you touch the nature of Nirvana, that will release you of all your fears. For those of us who have terminal illnesses, who have been contemplating death and dying, this is a very important practice. Not only for those who are in their terminal illness, but for all of us.

Sooner or later, we will have to take up the practice, because fear is always in us, insecurity is always in us, and that makes us suffer. To practice looking deeply, in order to touch Nirvana, is a very important practice. If you go to a Buddhist center to practice, that means that you want to get relief. You can suffer less, you can get relief, but the greatest relief of all you can only get when you are capable of touching Nirvana. Touching Nirvana is to get the greatest relief from fear of non-being, since things continue to be, things continue to manifest themselves in one form or other. Beneath these differences, the ground remains the same thing. Nirvana is the ground of our being, it is the nature of no-birth and no-death, and it is the extinction of all these notions like birth and death, being and non-being, permanence and annihilation, and also the extinction of all the sufferings that have been created by these notions. Our fear, our despair, our suffering...most of them are born from our illusions, our notions. You get angry because you have a notion. You get jealous because you have a notion. Even your notion of happiness, you have to get rid of it. Suppose you believe that you have to get that diploma, that position, you have to marry that person, otherwise life will not be worth living. So you have an idea of happiness, and you become a victim of that idea. Happiness can come in many thousands of ways, but you have already closed all the doors, and you have only opened one door. That is the notion you have of your happiness. It's very important to remove that notion of happiness. Allow happiness to come freely, and you have one million more chances to be happy. So even your idea of happiness is a notion, and you have to touch Nirvana by letting go of that notion. It is very easy to be happy, but you have forbidden yourself to be happy by establishing an idea of happiness. That is why Nirvana is the abolition of all ideas and notions, and also all the sufferings that are born from these notions and ideas. That is the essence of looking deeply.

"Contemplating Nirvana, I breathe in; contemplating non-craving, I breathe out." If you look deeply into the nature of things, your craving will vanish. It's not worth your time and your efforts. There are many objects of our craving: fame, sex, money, and good food—I mean the food that can bring a lot of trouble into your body. Looking deeply into the nature of these objects of our craving, you see that they are very dangerous. Not only can they not bring you happiness, but also they will destroy your body and your mind. Those of us who have tried that already have that experience and that insight. Happiness is not made of those objects of craving; happiness is made of freedom, of insight, of compassion, of true love. We can cultivate insight, freedom, compassion, love, and become very happy. Happiness cannot be without freedom. Those of us who have no freedom have no possibility to be happy. How free we are, we know by ourselves. We don't need another person to tell us how free we are from our afflictions, from our ideas, especially from our ideas. Therefore, looking deeply into the nature of what we crave is a deep practice.

The fish sees a beautiful bait, but the fish does not know that inside the bait there is a hook. The fish just swallows the bait, and gets caught by the hook, and gets pulled out of the water. We behave like the fish: we don't know the true nature of the object of our craving. We have become, many times, the victims of such craving, and we have suffered a lot, and yet we continue the course of running after these objects of craving. When you can see deeply into the nature of your craving, you get free. The Buddha described in many terms the nature of our craving. He said, "Like a person holding a torch and going against the wind, the fire will burn his hand. Those who go after the object of their craving will get burned, bodily and spiritually. Like a dog running after a piece of bare bone, and trying to eat it, no matter how many hours the dog bites at the piece of bare bone, he does not get any satisfaction." No matter how much time we spend with the object of our craving, we cannot get the satisfaction, fulfillment. We think it is happiness, but it is not happiness. Happiness is something else. It is not love, love is something else. It is not freedom, freedom is something else. When you read *the Sutra on the Better Way to Catch a Snake*,

you see how the Buddha described the objects of our craving, and he helped us learn how to look in order to see the dangers of these cravings. Of course we want to attain true happiness. There is a way to attain true happiness, and the practice of looking deeply helps us because when we have seen the true nature of our happiness we no longer cling to the object of our craving.

"Contemplating throwing away, I breathe in." "Throwing away" means throwing away ideas. The Vietnamese Zen teacher, Tang Hoi, who lived in the Third Century taught Buddhist meditation in Vietnam, and he went to South China and taught Buddhist meditation in the time of the Three Kingdoms. He described this practice as throwing away, first of all, the two notions. First is the notion that you are this body, "this body is me." The second notion is that "this life span is my life span", meaning that I did not exist before, and that I will not exist after this life span. So these are two basic ideas to throw away. Many of us are caught in the idea that these bodies are ourselves, and this is the origin of a lot of fear and suffering. You are more than this body; you are more than the elements of water, fire, air and earth in this body. You are large, much larger. Your nature is no-birth and no-death. You can be seen, you can be perceived, you can be touched everywhere, at any time. Your manifestation transcends time and space, because your true nature is the nature of no-birth and no-death, like water. You are not limited to the form and the sight of a wave, because you are water. That is why you have to meditate, in order to throw away the idea that "this body is me, that I am only this body." You have to transcend that; you have to throw away that idea.

The second notion is that you were born at a certain point in time, and that you will die and become nothing after that point in time. That notion, that idea, has to be removed too, because your true nature is no-birth and no-death. And the true nature of a flower is also like that, and of a cloud is also like that. This is a very important practice of looking deeply that can help you to liberate yourself from all kinds of anxiety and fear. I think this practice, this insight, can be very helpful to modern psychotherapy, which aims only at restoring a healthy self, that we have lost. But what is meant by "a healthy self?" That is the question. True healing and the greatest relief can only be obtained with the insight of no self. That does not mean that you are not there. No self does not mean non-existing.

(Bell)

Today we will have the opportunity to participate in a formal meal, as seen in monastic life. Please come with us into the meditation hall for the formal meal. The monastics will wear their orange Sanghati robes. We will practice taking the food and walking as in the time of the Buddha, mindfully each step, and you will do the same. The practice is called "one sitting lunch", and the whole time of eating is practice. Mindfulness and concentration are always present. You enjoy every moment of the lunch. During the lunch we eat in such a way that peace, stability and joy are possible. We don't think of the past or the future or anything. We just focus our attention on the food, and on the community of brothers and sisters around us. Dwelling in the present moment, allowing ourselves to be in the Sangha, and carried by the Sangha, as if the Sangha were a boat. We will profit from the collective energy of the Sangha.

If you participate, if you are there with us, please practice mindfulness of breathing, so that you have something to contribute to the Sangha. The collective energy of mindfulness will be strong. There will be a short chanting to offer the food to the Buddha, to the bodhisattvas and also to the living beings. There will be a chant of four lines by a novice monk to share the food with living beings, and during that time we will all practice being mindful, and send our energy of compassion to those living beings in the world who do not have anything to eat. The act of sharing is to water the seed of compassion in every one of us. We will enjoy eating together slowly, peacefully, and it will be very nourishing to our bodies and our souls at the same time. So please join us.

(Three bells)

(End of Dharma talk)



# Taking Good Care of Our Habit Energies\*

Dear friends,

Welcome to the Summer Opening in Plum Village. Who is three years old? Who is less than three years old? I would like to introduce to you Bao-tich who is four years old. He just celebrated his birthday two days ago. Here is Bao-tich. This is his second year in Plum Village to practice. Can you turn around? He came last year and he practiced very well. He was so happy, so this year he came again. Bao-tich is his name. It means the store of jewels. I am very happy that he is here. He has a great time being in Plum Village. He came about ten days ago and I had the opportunity to drink tea with him and to play with him. I am very happy when I am surrounded by young people. They look like flowers to me, very fresh, very innocent, and I wish that the young people will stay with us for the whole retreat, thirty days.

This year we will also practice pebble meditation, but instead of having five pebbles we have six. Each person may like to make a small bag like this. You are free to choose the color you like. I also have a bag of this color and inside I keep six pebbles. They are all here, six pebbles, one, two, three, four, five, six. In the other bag I have also six. They are bigger, like this. After having picked them up outside, I used soap to wash them carefully, and I dry them. Then I put them into a bag like this.

I think today you may like to make your own pebble bag. You go and pick up six beautiful pebbles, you wash them, you dry them, and you put them in your small bag, to practice pebble meditation. I think the grown-up people, if they want, they are welcome to do the same, pebble meditation. We will give a name to each pebble, a specific name to the pebble, and you may like to inscribe the name on each pebble also. Because this summer we are going to learn about the practice of the six *paramitas*, the six ways of crossing over to the other shore.

There is this shore of the river and there is the other shore of the river. When you are unhappy, you are on this shore, and you don't want to stay on this shore, you want to cross over to the other shore, the shore of happiness. When you are not peaceful, you are agitated; you are on this shore. You don't want to stay on this shore; it's not very pleasant to be agitated, so you want to cross over to the other shore, the shore of peace.

Suppose you are overwhelmed with anger and hatred. You don't like it because anger and hatred make you suffer. You don't want to stay there on the shore of anger and hatred, the shore of suffering, so you would like to cross over to the other shore, the shore of nonhatred, of compassion, of love. We are going to learn together how to

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\* Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 16, 1997 in Plum Village, France.

practice this kind of crossing. Don't believe that we need many years or months to cross to the other shore. Sometimes we need only a few minutes, or even a few seconds, to cross from one shore to the other shore. The six paramitas will be represented by the six pebbles. Each pebble will bear the name of one paramita. Paramita means crossing over to the other shore.

I'd like to teach you how to practice with the bell, because it is very important to practice with the bell, very pleasant also. There are all sorts of bells, and this is about the smallest kind of bell. This bell also has a cushion to sit on. This is a mini-bell. If you look at the bell, you see that it has also a cushion under it. So a practitioner may like to learn how to invite the bell to sound, because when we hear the sound of the bell we can also cross to the other shore. When you are angry, when you are sad, when you are agitated you are on this shore, but if you hear the sound of the bell, and if you know how to practice listening to the bell, then very quickly you can overcome your anger, your agitation. You cross over to the other shore, and suddenly you feel peaceful and happy. You need only to listen to the bell and breathe in and out a few times to find yourself on the other shore, the shore of peace, which is more pleasant. Every one of us can learn, it is very easy.

You may like to keep the bell on its cushion like this in order to invite the bell to sound. We don't say hitting the bell, because that word is not nice, or striking the bell. But we say invite the bell to sound. "Bell, my dear bell, may I invite you to sound." That's very nice. The bell becomes a kind of friend. So with your left hand you hold the bell like this and with your right hand you hold the bell inviter. You may call it a stick, but here we call it the bell inviter. And we say "the bell is invited" or "you invite the bell."

There are many of us who don't need the cushion. We put the bell directly on the palm of our hand, and by doing so we notice the sound will be more beautiful. You ask why? Because when we put the bell on the cushion, quite a large surface of the bell is touched by the cushion. The sound is all right, but if you put it without the cushion, the sound will be better. Suppose I hold the bell like this. The bell is not very free, that is why the sound of the bell isn't beautiful. See:

[Bell]

When the bell is free, the sound of the bell will be more beautiful. That is why in Plum Village, we like to put the bell like this on our hand in order for the bell to be as free as possible. When we invite the bell the sound will be beautiful. Before you invite the bell to sound, you have to bow to the bell first. Why do we have to bow to the bell? Maybe people will say that it's strange, why is this person bowing to a bell? It's queer. You may just look at the bell and say "Hello bell," that's all right too. Bowing to the bell is a way of greeting a bell. You can greet the bell with a smile. You can greet the bell with a few words: "Hello there, my little bell, my darling little bell." You can greet the bell in

several ways. There are people who would like to greet the bell by bowing like this, so it's up to you to choose.

So when you hold the stick, the bell inviter, you have to practice breathing in and breathing out three times, so that you become a real bell master. A real bell master is someone who is concentrated. The body and the mind together, and that is our practice. So even before we invite the bell to sound, we become already calmer and happier. You may like to breathe in and pay attention to your in-breath and breathe out and pay attention to your out-breath. You breathe in and breathe out like that three times. Now you have become concentrated, you have become a bell master. When you know that you are a bell master, you can begin to invite the bell.

I think today everyone has to practice, no matter how young you are. We should learn how to invite the bell. This is very important. To invite the bell you have to wake the bell up, like this. [Muffled bell] This is the waking up sound. Why do we have to wake the sound of the bell up first? Because we don't want the bell to be caught by surprise. We don't want the people around us to be caught by surprise. We want to warn people that a big sound of the bell will be heard. That is why we begin by waking up the bell like this. [Muffled bell] Everyone knows that they will hear a real sound of the bell in just a few seconds. So you prepare people. You give people the opportunity to stop thinking, to stop talking, to prepare themselves for receiving the sound of the bell. So you allow them about five or six seconds, or even more like this. [Muffled a bell] Then you invite the bell.

[Bell]

So we distinguish between the two sounds, the first is the waking up sound, and the second is the full sound, remember? To produce the waking up sound you have to keep the inviter like this. [Muffled bell] You don't take it off, like this. [Bell] You breathe in. Everyone knows that a full sound is going to be heard, so everyone stops thinking and begins to smile to receive the sound of the bell. When the full sound is heard, you practice breathing in and you recite a short poem.

"I listen, I listen," that's when you breathe in. And when you breathe out, "This wonder sound brings me back to my true home." My true home is in here, where I can find peace and stability and joy. So we have to learn by heart this short poem:

Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home.

"Listen, listen," that is for your in-breath. "This wonderful sound brings me back to my true home," that is for your out-breath. You breathe in and breathe out three times like that before you invite the second sound. Everyone in the hall will be practicing with you, and enjoying breathing in, breathing out and listening to the bell. After having

practice three sounds like that, you become much better, you are calmer, you are more stable, you are more joyful. That is the practice of calming.

I think I am going to lend you this bell, the young people, and you have time to practice this morning and this afternoon, also. I have a few. I would recommend that before you practice inviting the bell, you look at the bell, you bow to the bell, and you say "Hello bell." You pick it up and you put it in on your left hand like this. You raise your hand to the level of your eyes. This is a very beautiful movement. You look at the bell like that. You breathe in, breathe out, and you smile three times. You know in Plum Village we have a beautiful poem to recite silently when we look at the bell and breathe in and breathe out. This poem is like this:

*Body, speech and mind in perfect oneness  
I send my heart along with the sound of this bell.  
May the hearers awaken from forgetfulness  
And transcend the path of anxiety and sorrow.*

All of us know it by heart. The poem is available in Vietnamese, in French, in English, in German, and so on. You can learn it. Every time I breathe I read silently one line and when I breathe out I read the second line and so on. I repeat:

*Body, speech and mind in perfect oneness  
I send my heart along with the sound of this bell.  
May the hearers awaken from forgetfulness  
And transcend the path of anxiety and sorrow.*

After you have breathed in and out like that you become calm, you become a bell master. You can begin to invite the bell. Shall we try to practice together? You will breathe and I will read the *gatha*, the poem for you.

*Body, speech and mind in perfect oneness  
I send my heart along with the sound of this bell.  
May the hearers awaken from forgetfulness  
And transcend the path of anxiety and sorrow.*

Now I am waking up the bell.

[Muffled bell]

Now I am inviting the bell.

[Bell]

Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Now I invite the second sound.

[Bell]

Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Now I invite the third sound.

[Bell]

Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home.

I have completed three sounds and I have breathed in and breathed out nine times. I slowly lower the bell and I put it on the cushion. I bow to it again. I have accomplished the task of being your bell master. This is for the small bell, for the big bell it is a little bit different, but we will learn later.

What is the purpose of practicing the bell? Practicing the bell is one of the ways to help us cross to the other shore. When you are angry, when you are unhappy, when you are agitated, you don't like to be on the shore of anger, agitation and unhappiness. So you invite the bell to bring your body and your mind together, to get still, to get calm, to get peaceful. And while you practice breathing in and out and listening to the bell, you are crossing the river of suffering. You go to the other shore, the shore of peace and of happiness.

It is my hope that in every home we have a bell, so that you can practice crossing to the other shore together as a family. In Plum Village we practice also when we hear the telephone ringing. If you observe, you see that every time the telephone rings, the brothers and sisters in Plum Village practice breathing in and out, calming and smiling exactly like when they hear the bell. So the telephone sound becomes a kind of bell for us. We also practice with other sounds as well. When the clock, every hour or every quarter of the hour, plays the music, the monks, the nuns, and other people in Plum Village, they stop talking, they stop thinking and they go back to their breathing. They practice mindful breathing, and they feel calm, they feel happy. They are close to the shore of happiness and peace. I think there will be brothers and sisters that will help you to learn how to practice the bell today. I hope that after tomorrow you will be able to do it. This is the end of the dharma talk for young people. When you hear the bell please stand up and bow to the sangha before you go out and learn more about the practice.

[Bell]

My dear friends, we have several kinds of energies within ourselves. There are positive energies that we should cultivate, and there are negative energies that we should be able to transform. We have habits. We have good habits and we have bad habits, and the practice of Buddhist meditation is to recognize our habits, in the form of energies, and to transform them or nourish them. When you hear the telephone ring, or when you hear the sound of the bell, if you have the habit of the practice, you need no one to remind you. You just stop you thinking and enjoy breathing in and out. This is a good habit. In Plum Village all of us have that good habit. Every time we hear the bell. Every time we hear the clock playing the music, or the telephone ringing, we always naturally go back to our breathing, and we enjoy our in-breath and out-breath and smile. We don't make any effort because it has become a habit, a good habit. We learn to do it in a way that makes the moment pleasant.

There is no point of practicing if it is not pleasant. The practice should be pleasant. This is very important. When you practice listening to the bell, the practice should be pleasant and nourishing. Otherwise, why should we practice? The same is true with the practice of sitting, walking, eating in silence, and so on. There are many people who practice sitting meditation, walking meditation, sharing a silent meal, but not everyone enjoys the practice.

If you don't enjoy your practice, it means you are not doing it the way you should do it. The question is not to practice or not to practice. The question is to practice in such a way that you get the healing, the transformation, and the joy of the practice.

In our tradition the practice of meditation is seen as a source of nourishment. So it is very important that we make the practice pleasant, joyful and nourishing. If while sitting you suffer, then you should know that your way of sitting is not correct. If you are sharing a silent meal and you don't feel happy, it means that your way of eating is not correct. Something has to be corrected in your way of practicing, your way of looking at the practice, your way of conducting the practice. We have brothers and sisters around, we can always consult them and ask them for their experiences. They will show you. Many of us have been in the practice for a long time and we can help you to practice with more joy. We have to practice with intelligence.

[Bell]

Suppose we have the habit of walking very quickly, very fast. Suddenly, when we arrive at Plum Village, we are requested to slow down. We feel it is not pleasant. Since everyone is walking slowly, you have to slow down and you don't feel happy. So your practice is a cause for your suffering. Walk slowly, yes, but walk in such a way that it makes you happy, relaxed and calm, that is the point. We have to ask how to walk

slowly and yet not to suffer and to enjoy the walking. So it requires some understanding, some insight, some practice, to enjoy walking meditation.

You are facing a kind of habit, the habit of walking very quickly, running. That habit is rooted very deeply in our daily life. Maybe our ancestors used to walk very quickly and they have transmitted to us that way of walking. Perhaps many generations of people have believed that happiness is somewhere there in the future. We have to go there in order to be happy. Happiness is not possible right now, right here. That kind of belief, conscious or unconscious, has become very strong in us. We believe happiness is impossible here and now. That is why there is a kind of energy pushing us to run, to run all our life, searching for a time, a place, when happiness is possible.

So we understand why we get caught in that kind of habit, always running. We are determined to stop, to transform that habit, and we learn how to make steps that can allow us to touch life deeply in each moment. With that kind of learning and practice we will be able to walk more slowly and we will begin to enjoy touching the earth with our feet, combining our steps with our in-breath and out-breath. We just feel wonderful to walk like that, walking without any intention of arriving. That is new for us. We have to learn to develop the new habit. And as we get the energy of the new habit, we will enjoy walking.

So the practice is to recognize the old habit, the negative habit, the bad habit, to recognize the energy of our habits and smile to them. And also to cultivate the new habit, the good habit, until the new habit begins to produce energy. When we have the new kind of energy, we don't have to make any effort, we just enjoy listening to the bell, we just enjoy walking slowly, we just enjoy eating in silence, because we like it. We get the nourishment, the joy, of doing so. Suddenly, the practice becomes pleasant, joyful, nourishing.

It would be absurd if we followed a practice that makes us suffer. The Buddha always reminds us his Dharma, his practice, is pleasant in the beginning, in the middle, at the end. So the practice should be lovely, should be pleasant, should be joyful, whether you are sitting or walking or eating or drinking. Whether you are cooking or cleaning. Cooking and cleaning should be done in such a way that it can provide you with peace and joy and nourishment.

We know how strong, how powerful is the habit energy. We notice that there are times when we are not ourselves. We cannot be ourselves. We are carried away by our habit energy. We did not want to say that, we knew that saying that would create damage in our relationship with the other person. But finally, we said it. We knew that we should not do it. We knew that if we went ahead and did it we would create damage in our relationship. But finally, we did it. We said it was stronger than us. What is stronger? The habit energy. So we felt helpless, powerless. We felt very weak that we cannot cope

with it. It is so strong, our habit energy. And after having said it, after having done it, we regret it. We feel sorry. We condemn ourselves. Sometimes we make a strong vow that next time we will not do it again. We will not say it again. But next time, we do it again, we say it again. The habit energy is very strong. That is why we have to be able to practice, to learn ways of handling that habit energy in order to transform it.

The Buddha did not recommend fighting against your habit energy. He recommended the practice of recognizing these habits. The practice of recognizing, if we take it up in our daily practice, will become another kind of habit, a good habit. You are able to recognize everything that is happening within yourself, including the habit energy that you consider to be stronger than you. Recognizing like that does not mean that you have to suffer because you have that habit, because that habit may not have been learned during your lifetime. It may be a kind of habit energy transmitted by several generations of your ancestors and you just received it. You have to recognize that it is there and try to transform it for yourself, for your parents, and for your ancestors.

About ten years ago I toured in several states of India to offer retreats and Dharma talks to the communities of the Ambedkar society consisting of the former untouchables. A friend there helped arrange my tour. One day I was sitting with him in a bus. I was enjoying very much the landscape outside. I was very happy to be in India, to offer retreats and Dharma talks and to enjoy the people and landscape there. When I looked over at him, he was sitting on my right, he was not relaxed. He was very tight. He had the habit energy to worry too much. I knew that he was trying his best to make my trip pleasant, so I told him, "My dear friend, I know you are trying very hard to make my visit pleasant, but I would like to tell you that I am very happy right now, it is very pleasant to sit here, I enjoy it very much, why don't you sit back and enjoy yourself, also. There is nothing to worry about now." He said, "OK" and he sat back. I continued to enjoy the palm trees and other things outside and just a few minutes later I turned around and looked and he was just like before, very tight, very rigid.

I know it is not easy. When you belong to a caste discriminated against for four thousand, five thousand years, you have to struggle day and night. The habit to struggle day and night was there deep in him. It had been transmitted by several generations of ancestors. There he is with his strong habit energy, struggling day and night, not being able to relax for a second, for a minute. Of course we can help him to relax, to understand that there is nothing to worry about, that it is possible for us to enjoy life in the present moment. He is perfectly capable of understanding this and practicing this, but it does not last. Just for a few seconds and he allows himself to be caught again by that very strong habit energy. So there is no point of blaming yourself because you have that habit energy. You know that that habit energy is not something you created for yourself, it has been transmitted. You recognize your ancestors who have suffered. You know that now you have an opportunity to transform that energy for yourself, for your ancestors, and for your children and their children.



Also about ten years ago there was a young gentleman who came from North America to the Upper Hamlet for the practice and he stayed two, three weeks in the Upper Hamlet, very happy. He was surrounded by brothers and sisters who always practiced walking meditation, sitting meditation, working in the kitchen with mindfulness, and so on. One day he was asked by friends to go to the market in St. Foy La Grande to do some shopping, because it was Thanksgiving Day and everyone was asked to make a dish, to cook something special of their country, to offer to our ancestors. The Chinese would cook a Chinese dish, the Dutch would offer a Dutch plate, and so on. He was making something with the other Americans so he went to St. Foy La Grande and shopped.

While shopping he noticed that he became agitated, that he was getting in a hurried mood. He was surprised, because during his three-week stay in Plum Village he never behaved like that. He was surrounded by the sangha, he was always mindful and peaceful. The energy of the sangha helped him stay mindful and peaceful, but here he was alone. Suddenly without the sangha around that old habit energy emerged. Because he had practiced for three weeks already, he also had another kind of energy, the energy of mindfulness. He was able to recognize the coming up of the old habit. He also saw that he inherited that habit from his mother, because his mother was always like that, always in a hurry.

So he breathed in and he said, "Hello Mommy." Suddenly the habit energy was no longer there. When you recognize it, that energy will lose its power over you. It will go back into the depth of your consciousness, into your body, waiting for appropriate circumstances to manifest again. He just breathed in and said, "Hello Mommy" recognizing the habit as it was. "My mother is always like that." So he was free from the habit during the practice of breathing in and breathing out. He knew that without the sangha around he was still weak and he tried to follow his breathing mindfully. He finished his shopping and came back and told us the story.

You can recognize the habit energy because you have the energy of mindfulness, a kind of energy within you that does the work of recognition. Mindfulness is the energy that can recognize what is there in the present moment. When you drink, you know that you are drinking. When you breathe in and you know that you are breathing in, the energy of mindfulness is there. We call it mindfulness of breathing, *Anapanasati*. When you walk, and you know that you are walking, mindfulness is there. It is called mindfulness of walking. When you eat and you know that you are eating, that you are chewing, then mindfulness is there, we call it mindfulness of eating.

We try to be mindful in every act we do, in every moment of our daily life, and that is the best way to cultivate the second kind of energy, the energy of mindfulness.

If you practice walking mindfully, breathing mindfully, sitting mindfully, doing things mindfully, you cultivate the kind of energy called mindfulness. Only with that energy can you recognize the old habits and prevent them from pushing you to do things that you don't want to do, to say things that you don't want to say. So cultivating the energy of mindfulness is the heart of our practice. That is why our friends are requested to practice walking mindfully, breathing mindfully, and eating mindfully. From your tent to the meditation hall, you are requested to walk mindfully.

Every step must be mindful. You may like to coordinate your steps with your in-breath. When you breathe in, you know you are breathing in, mindfulness of breathing. When you make a step, you know that you are making a step, mindfulness of walking. You can combine the two. Breathing in you make two steps or three steps, breathing out you make two steps or three steps. You don't need to arrive in the meditation hall to practice meditation. You begin already from your tent. And you may begin even before that.

When you hear the bell announcing sitting meditation, the sound brings you back to your true home, already. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. There you are in your tent, but you are already in the meditation hall. Every one of us in our tent, in our room, we are listening to the bell. We are practicing breathing in calmly, breathing out smiling. We are practicing together as a sangha. After having practiced with the bell, we begin to walk in the direction of the meditation hall. Everyone is doing it at the same time, so the meditation hall is everywhere, should be everywhere, even in private, in the shower room.

If you practice like that one week, two weeks, three weeks, you'll be like our friend going to the market of St. Foy La Grande, shopping and having the capacity to recognize the habit energy when it emerges. Recognize it as it is, smile to it, and do not fight it, you don't need to fight it. You don't need to feel ashamed of it. It's like when you do the work of gardening. There are fresh vegetables, there are flowers, but there is also garbage. We know that vegetables or garbage, they are all organic. Flowers sometime have to turn themselves into garbage. And garbage, if you know how to take care of it, will be transformed into flowers again. Both flowers and garbage are organic matter. We don't discriminate against the garbage, because we know that with the garbage we can make flowers again. So the bad habits, the negative energies in us, you don't have to throw them away. You may like to make use of them to feed your good habits.

So the practice of meditation does not mean that you draw a line of discrimination between the positive energy, what you call goodness, and the negative energy, what you call evil. That is not the way. That is discrimination. That is not the insight that you should use. The insight is interbeing. You look at both as organic. This is because that is. That is because this is. So with the garbage you can make the flowers and the flowers are to become garbage later on.

The process of gardening is the process of continued transformation. We recognize the flowers in us; we recognize also the garbage in us. We do not have to discriminate. If it is a flower, we recognize it as a flower. "Hello, flower." If it is a piece of garbage, we say "Hello garbage." No discrimination. No fear. The only thing is to learn how to practice gardening. You are an organic gardener. You know how to take care of your bad habit energies, to transform them into the good ones. We don't imagine that after having eliminated all the negative things we only have the positive things, because the positives feed on the negative and vice versa. So that is the insight of nonduality. It is so important in the teaching of Buddhist meditation. The insight of interbeing: garbage and flowers inter-are.

So when you have learned how to accept the negative things in you, you already have peace. I don't mind that there are negative things in me. I accept them. I have learned a way to take care of my negative things. I also have learned a way to take care of my positive things, to keep them alive longer. I have learned how to transform the negative things, in order to nourish the positive things. All of that can be done only if you have the energy of mindfulness. That is why our practice here is to learn how to eat mindfully and joyfully, how to walk mindfully and joyfully, how to breathe mindfully and joyfully. The "mindfully" should go together with the "joyfully." While sitting together and eating in silence there are a number of people who are very happy, just to sit there and share a meal with the sangha, It can make many people very happy. Because eating is a very deep practice, it's like when you practice sitting, or walking, or washing you clothes. Your practice may be very deep if the energy of mindfulness is strong during the practice.

[Bell]

We know what the negative habit energies have done to us and our beloved ones. We know that we have to take good care of our habit energies and to transform them. That is why we are determined to cultivate the energy of mindfulness in order to recognize that habit energy every time it tries to come up. This is very important. Therefore, during the time together here we do everything with the purpose of cultivating that energy. That is why we don't spend our time talking a lot, or thinking a lot, or reading a lot, or studying a lot. We use our time here in order to just practice mindfulness. Mindfulness everywhere, mindfulness every time. Walking, we only walk mindfully. Eating, we only eat mindfully. We try to do everything mindfully, because we want to have enough of that energy to be able to recognize our habit energy. Because we know that once we are able to recognize the habit energy, the habit energy will not overwhelm us again. Every time the habit energy is recognized it will lose some of its strength. And the next time when it comes up again we do the recognition again. That is the only way to diminish its power. By doing so we use that energy to feed the new habit energy, the positive habit energy.

We should be able to recognize that around us there are refreshing, beautiful, and healing things, and inside us there are refreshing, healing and wonderful things. The wonders of life are everywhere, within us and around us. Cultivating the habit of recognizing them, touching them is very important. The sky may be very blue, very clear, and very beautiful, but if you are caught in your sorrow, caught in your anger, you cannot touch the blue sky. The children are fresh, lovely, but you have no capacity of being with them, of recognizing them as the miracles around us. We imprison ourselves in our sorrows, our worries, our fears. We are not capable of touching the beauties, the wonders of life around us, and even inside of us. So we have to practice to learn the new habit of touching these wonders of life.

To be alive, to be still alive, is a miracle. To be able to walk with other people on this beautiful planet, it's a wonderful thing. Remember when you were very sick, unable to breathe, you could not enjoy your breathing. You had a fever, and you had no strength to go out of your room. Your strength had left you. Your desire was to be able to get up and to go into the garden and just walk in the garden, but you could not do it. So having strong feet, being able to walk, having eyes still in good condition that allow us to contemplate the sky, the clouds, the luxurious vegetation, to look at the people, the children; it's a wonderful thing. But we had that bad energy, that negative energy, of neglecting these kinds of things; we only tried to focus on our suffering, our problems. So we had to learn to cultivate that new energy, to recognize and to touch the positive things. Because we need the nourishment, the healing. If we cannot touch the healing and refreshing elements around us and in us, we cannot get the healing and nourishment. Therefore cultivating the energy of mindfulness to recognize what is there, wonderful, refreshing, healing, is very important.

A pebble, a cloud, a flower, all are wonderful, all are mysteries. It would be a pity if we cannot be with a leaf, with a flower, with a cloud, with a stream of water, only imprison ourselves in our sorrow and fear. So recognizing the habit energy, recognizing our fear, our sorrow.

Yes, that is our practice. But to recognize the sky as it is, to recognize the fact that you are alive, that you are walking, that there are living beings around you, that you have eyes that can look at things, you have fingers that can touch things, is equally important. The practice is simple and you have the sangha around you. Everyone is trying to do the same, living each moment of our daily life deeply, trying to dwell in, to establish ourselves in the present moment. Not to run, because running is a strong habit energy, running to the future, or running to the past. That is why the Buddha made it clear that the past is already gone and the future is not yet there. There is only one moment when life is available; that is the present moment. Your appointment with life is in the present moment. If you are not able to touch the present moment, you miss your appointment with life. All these things are very simple, and not difficult to understand at all. Therefore, all our energies and time should be used to put it into practice.

Let us together practice mindfulness in our daily life. Let us learn how to go back to the present moment, to live deeply every moment of our daily life. Because in that present moment you will find the most beautiful things, what we are looking for: peace, joy, stability, love, the kingdom of God, the pure land. All these things can be touched and found only in the present moment.

So learning how to go back to the present moment and to live deeply in that moment is the kind of new habit energy that you have to cultivate, and as a sangha we do it together. You are requested to practice listening to the bell, but when there is no bell you may like to practice listening to the birds, mindfully. Because every sound can help you go back to the present moment and to practice. Every sight, also, can serve as a mindfulness bell. When you see a brother, a sister walking mindfully, a monk or a nun walking mindfully, that is another mindfulness bell, you go back to yourself, you enjoy breathing in, breathing out, you touch yourself, you touch life, you touch the world deeply in that moment. To meditate means to be alive, to live deeply in that moment. That is why we practice Noble Silence. When we wake we begin to walk, begin to arrange things in mindfulness, we follow our breathing, we listen to the bell mindfully, we go to the meditation hall mindfully, we enjoy the minutes of sitting, of walking, of chanting mindfully, we enjoy our breakfast mindfully. Everything is for practice. Eating your breakfast is the practice.

Allow yourself to be penetrated by the collective energy of the sangha. Offer your energy of mindfulness to the sangha. When you practice mindful breathing and walking you emit the energy of mindfulness from you. And everyone is practicing and emitting the energy of mindfulness. That is why being in sangha we can allow ourselves to be penetrated by that kind of energy of mindfulness. It will be transforming and healing to us. So we receive the energy of the sangha and we participate and contribute to that collective energy. That is why practicing in a sangha is much more pleasant and easier than when you practice alone. Practicing together, walking, breathing, sitting, doing things, we offer each other the energy of mindfulness.

After the retreat we can continue to cultivate that energy at home. We may like to set up a sangha in your area to continue your practice. Because according to this practice the energy of mindfulness is the only kind of energy that can help change our life. Bring back the joy of life, bring back love, understanding, and transform the old habit energies that have been causing us and the people we love a lot of suffering. In dharma discussions let us not be theoretical, let us be very practical, let us exchange the experiences of our practice: how to dwell firmly in the present moment and how to live deeply each moment of our life. How to encounter life deeply in order for us to look deeply and get the kind of insights that will be able to liberate us from our anger, our fear and our suffering.

After this dharma talk we shall gather outside for a short walking meditation and we will gather around the big bell tower for some chanting.

[Bell]

# The Art of Healing Ourselves

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Good Morning Dear Friends,

Today is the thirtieth of July, 1996 and we are in the Upper Hamlet. Today is also the full moon day. Tonight I hope that the full moon will be there for all of us. If the sky is clear, I will be happy to invite you to sit with me on the platform of my hut under the moon.

We have been talking to the children about the twenty-first century. We want to prepare ourselves to be ready for the twenty-first century. We have been talking about how to make our home comfortable for the twenty-first century. We talked about a room in which we can practice peace, reconciliation with ourselves, where we can restore ourselves, where we can take refuge. We talked about a local park taken care of by twenty or thirty houses. We discussed how to make that park into a center of peace and joy for children and for adults.

I would like to continue, because it is our duty to practice looking deeply in order to make life more pleasant for ourselves and for those we love. I want to talk about a day of mindfulness—a day for each family and from time to time, for many families at the same time.

In Plum Village we have been doing things that are very exciting. We are preparing the chanting book for the twenty-first century. We have nearly finished it. We will have it printed just two years before the twenty-first century. We have also prepared a book of practice for the young novice of the twenty-first century. We have been preparing a lot and we do it with a lot of joy. So this matter of taking care of the twenty-first century, it has to be the job of everyone because we only have four years before the new century starts. And we have decided to climb the hill of the twenty-first century together in peace, with a lot of happiness.

[Bell]

One of the things we have talked about concerning the preparation for the new century is how to handle our garbage. Because during this twentieth century we have produced a lot of garbage, a lot of suffering. We have created a lot of war, created a lot of suffering, a lot of discrimination, a lot of death. If we don't know how to take care of that garbage, the twenty-first century will not be pleasant. And we have only four years left to take care of our garbage. How to pile it up, how to transform it into compost, so that the flowers of the twenty-first century would have a chance to bloom? This is a big job and we have to do it together. We have to come together and practice looking deeply concerning how to handle the garbage we have produced. One person cannot do much.

[Bell]

Personally, I want the twenty-first century to be called the century of love. Because we desperately need love. The kind of love that will not produce suffering. There is a Buddha that is supposed to be born to us. His name is Maitreya. Maitri means love. So, Maitreya means Mr. Love. In order to prepare for that Buddha to come, we need time. We need to coordinate our efforts. Several times I have said that the new Buddha may not be in the form of one person. The new Buddha may take the form of a Sangha. The Sangha means community, community of

practice. Naturally I myself and all my friends are working hard in order for the Buddha to come in the form of the community, Buddha as a Sangha.

The first element of love is *maitri*, the willingness to bring happiness to the person we love, the people we love, and therefore to ourselves. Because we know that if the other person is happy then we will be happy also. The Buddha said when you wake up in the morning you ask yourself this question, "What can I do today to make my Sangha happy?" This is a good practice. What can I do today to make him happy? What can I do today to make her happy? What can I do today to make them happy? To make my Sangha happy? That is the first question we have to ask in the morning.

I would like to say something about this question. Because I think that to do something may bring happiness, but just to not do something is equally important. If you are able to refrain from doing something you can make many people happy. So the question might be put like this, "What can I refrain from doing today in order to make my Sangha happy?" Because in our daily life we might do things that make our beloved one suffer. Therefore just not to do it is good enough to make them happy. What can I do today to make the Sangha happy? What can I refrain from doing today in order to make my Sangha happy? This is a very good question. You have the willingness to love and to make people happy. You know that you'll be happy if the other people are happy. No one questions your good will—you really want to love, you want to make people happy. So, you want to make it not only a wish but a reality. So you try to do something, or you try to not do something, in order for happiness to be possible.

The day of mindfulness we organize each week in our family may be a very good opportunity for us to learn to do this. A day of mindfulness is like a breathing room in our home. It's something that a civilized family should practice. In the old time, people didn't work on Sunday—I hope they still practice that. Sunday is not the day for you to work. In Plum Village we call Saturday "lazy day." To be lazy, that's not easy. You have to learn how to do it. On lazy days I used to ask people this question: "Dear friend, are you lazy enough?" To practice a lazy day is not easy, therefore we have to support each other in making it a real lazy day. Because we have the tendency to work hard, to be busy. A day of mindfulness, or maybe half a day of mindfulness, is what we have to do to increase the happiness in our family, in our society.

The question is how to organize that half-day or day of mindfulness so that everyone can enjoy it. It should not be hard practice. Because I don't really like the word "hard" practice or "intensive" practice—I don't know what it means, "intensive practice of meditation." When I drink a glass of water in mindfulness, I practice mindfulness of drinking, and I get a lot of joy and peace during the time of drinking a glass of water. But can I drink my glass of water intensively? No. It does not mean anything to me. To drink water you just drink it with mindfulness. The more you are mindful, the more the drinking becomes a pleasure. The problem is whether you drink it in mindfulness or not. The problem is not whether you drink it intensively or not intensively. The same thing is true with walking meditation. If you walk with mindfulness, your steps will bring you a lot of joy and peace. If you don't, then there's no joy and peace. It is not a matter of being intensive or not intensive.

So we need the intelligence of everyone in the family to make the day of mindfulness a very pleasant day. And a day of mindfulness, according to me, is a day when we practice what we can do for the happiness of our beloved ones. It is very crucial that everyone in the family, everyone in the community, practices together; otherwise it would be very difficult. Imagine a family of five people. Only one person wants to practice mindfulness. It is possible, but it is extremely difficult. So, if you are in a family where everyone agrees on the practice of a day of mindfulness, you are a very lucky person. And you have to use all your intelligence. You have to tell your father, your mother, your brothers and your sisters, how you would like to organize a day of mindfulness. I repeat, a day of mindfulness a week is something very civilized. Because we know that without peace, without calm, happiness would not be possible.

A day of mindfulness is a time when we practice and enjoy peace. Enjoy calm. Enjoy communication. It is not because you can talk a lot that you can communicate. It is because you are peaceful, calm—you have the capacity to listen deeply to the other person—that you can communicate. Therefore, in the day of mindfulness you don't talk much. You practice listening deeply with your calm, with your peace and everyone is like that. That does not mean that joy will be diminished. In a day of mindfulness, even when people don't talk a lot to each other, they communicate more with each other by many ways. It can be a very joyful and happy day. I think you will all agree with me that the lazy day each week here is a very nice day. Although we practice silence, this silence is very helpful. It helps communication. It is not oppressive.



What can I do to make the people I love happy? That is our practice in the day of mindfulness. To me, to make another person happy you have to practice being there. To practice being there that is the essence of Buddhist meditation. But perhaps during the week you are not there with the people you love. You are always absent, even if you are eating with them or watching television with them. You are not really there for them. You have not made your presence true and available to the people you love. To me to love means to be there for the person you love. It is very simple, but it is a very deep practice. In Buddhist meditation we learn how to breathe, how to walk, how to smile so that we be there entirely with our true presence, because that is the most precious thing that we can give to the people we love. When you go to your mother and you sit quietly close to her, and you look at her and you say, "Mommy, I am really here for you," you are practicing meditation, because you are truly there with the person you love.

[Bell]

The day of mindfulness therefore must be a day where members of the same family have to be really there for each other. That is the principle. How to do it? I rely on you to tell me. So we need to sit together and discover. The television companies who publicize their products say, "We bring people together." They mean that things like videotapes and television programs bring people together. I don't believe this much because, as I see it, people who spend the day apart from each other and come home very tired don't have time to be with each other. They turn on the television set and just get lost in that. So television does not bring people together.

What then can bring people together? I think a day of mindfulness. They practice being there for each other. This is very important. This is a kind of answer to the suffering of our time—to practice being there for ourselves and for the people we love; it is very important. In a meditation center like Plum Village we should learn methods of producing our true presence for ourselves and for the people we love. Practice mindful breathing. Practice quiet sitting, smiling. Practice walking meditation. Practice drinking a glass of water in mindfulness. Practice eating your lunch in mindfulness. All these are to produce your true presence. It is very important. Because that is the essence of love, to be there, available, for the people you love.

What can I do to make them happy? We're talking about what we can do. But we don't talk about how we can be. To do maybe is less important than to be. To be there, fresh and calm and loving. I think that is the foundation of love. What you can do is just of secondary importance. Therefore, to be there—calm, loving, fresh, is a very important practice. If meditation cannot help you to be there, to be calm, to be fresh for your beloved one, don't practice meditation. It does not help. So practice meditation in such a way that you can be there really, with some calm, some peace, some freshness, and you know that your meditation practice is good meditation, good practice. That is the whole process of learning. If you have succeeded to some extent, you tell your brother and sister how you have done meditation—that you become more quiet, more released from your suffering, more present for your beloved one. I think that my discussion has to be focused on these practical methods.

I trust that you know how to share breakfast together in mindfulness, in joy. I know that there are people in the morning before starting off to work who eat their breakfast like everyone else. But, they don't practice being there for the people who will be also away for the day. And whom they cannot see for many hours, maybe eight or ten hours. Instead of drinking their tea or their coffee mindfully and smiling to that person sitting across the table, they hold a newspaper like this and hide themselves behind the piece of paper. It is not very wise. It's not very nice. So in a day of mindfulness we won't do things like that. We won't turn our television set on. We turn everything off, except one thing, our presence.

We turn our presence on, and beginning in the morning, when we wake up, we think: "What can I do to make them happy? What should I refrain from doing in order to make them happy?" Please answer these questions in detail, then you will know how to organize a beautiful day of mindfulness. Having breakfast together, that is an art. How to prepare your breakfast and how to sit down and enjoy breakfast together, I need many sessions of Dharma discussions in order to find it out. We would profit a lot from your collective deep looking, your knowledge, your experience about how to organize a breakfast where joy and peace and love can be possible. Give us a Dharma talk, give us a report, give us a Dharma discussion that helps us to learn how to do it. There are those of us who prepare our breakfast while following our in-breath and our out-breath, smiling to the bread, the milk, the muesli, and so on, and who are full of love in the heart. "I am making this breakfast for my Sangha. I am nourishing my Sangha because my Sangha is my body, the Sangha body." Even if the other brothers and sisters don't contribute to making the breakfast, I would not be angry because I am preparing breakfast with love. So there's no jealousy, there's no rancor in my heart. During the time I prepare my breakfast, I am nourished with love. My Sangha is me,

my Sangha is my body, therefore I prepare my breakfast with joy.

You may like to make a little bit of preparation beforehand. Tomorrow will be the day of mindfulness. Today you might already enjoy making a few preparations so that tomorrow would be wonderful. Maybe a few flowers for tomorrow, maybe a special tablecloth, maybe a loaf of special bread for tomorrow. You are motivated by the idea, by the desire, to be happy and to make your beloved one happy. Eating breakfast in such a way that happiness and love can be present. Then you may enjoy walking meditation in a park or just in the front yard. Everyone in the family should know how to walk in order to generate peace and joy and togetherness by walking. You don't have to walk very long, you just walk the time you want to walk. And each step like that can bring you a lot of joy and peace and happiness.

If you want to invite a child from another family or a friend to join your day of mindfulness, please do it. Because you are motivated by the desire to make him or her happy with your mindfulness day. Many, many years ago—I think about twenty-five or thirty years ago—I wrote a little book where I proposed a day of mindfulness every week. A day when we have really the opportunity to practice attention, mindfulness, love, and care to ourselves and to the people we love. I think in the twenty-first century, to hold a day of mindfulness a week is a very civilized thing to do. Not only for the Buddhists, but for everyone. They may not call it a "day of mindfulness," but it must be of the same essence: cultivating peace, cultivating togetherness, cultivating the present moment. It is very important for our happiness.

Before the children go out and play, I would like to remind of them of the practice of visiting the Buddha that I have proposed to children in Holland—they love it. And if the adults want to practice, it's okay also. Visiting the Buddha. The Buddha is within yourself, the real Buddha. The Buddha you see in the garden is a Buddha, but made with plaster, it's not a real Buddha. When you bow to that Buddha, if you bow correctly, you touch the Buddha within. A real Buddha is not made of copper or gold or plaster—a real Buddha is made with mindfulness. Mindfulness carries understanding, peace, and love. So bow to the Buddha in such a way that you touch Buddha inside and you know Buddha is not something abstract, it is your mindfulness.

You have proved to be mindful at times. You are very capable of drinking a glass of milk mindfully. One day I was drinking my milk, very slowly and mindfully. I saw the cow as my adopted mother. I feel very happy to have the chance not to eat my mother. I am vegetarian, and I feel very lucky not to be forced to eat the flesh of my adopted mother. Every time I drive from the Upper Hamlet to the Lower Hamlet, looking at the straw, I see milk in it inside, because a mother cow will eat it and it will become milk. So when I look at the milk I see the straw and when I look at the straw I see milk, I see the water, I see the sky, I see the sunshine, and I practice like that all day. I can see the nature of inter-being in everything, everyone.

This is very wonderful because it reveals to me a wonderful world of interconnection. Trying to look at things like that will reduce all my fear, and discrimination and anger. It is very important, because in Buddhism we speak about liberation from suffering by understanding. The children prove to be able to be compassionate, to be loving, to be calm at times—therefore the Buddha is real inside. There is no doubt. When I make a lotus flower and bow to a child, I say, "A lotus for you, my dear, you who are a Buddha to be." If you want to be a Buddha, you can be a Buddha. A Buddha is someone who is made of mindfulness. You know how to drink a glass of milk mindfully. You know how to walk mindfully or to breathe mindfully. During the time you do so, you touch Buddhahood in you, the Buddha nature in you.

So it's very nice to visit the Buddha within from time to time. You might like to sit down quietly and breathe in and out for a few minutes to calm yourself, and then you ask, "Little Buddha, my little Buddha, are you there?" Ask very deeply; ask the question very deeply and quietly, "My little Buddha, are you there?" In the beginning you might not hear the answer. There is an answer always, but because you are not calm enough, you don't hear the answer. "Anyone there? Little Buddha, are you there?" Then the second time you begin to hear the voice of your little Buddha answering you, "Yes, my dear, of course I am always there for you." When you hear that you smile, "I know. Little Buddha, you are my calm. I know you are always there and I need you, to be calm, from time to time. From time to time I am not calm enough. I scream, I act as if I do not have the Buddha in me. But because I know you are there, I know that I have the capacity of being calm. Thank you little Buddha, you are my calm. I need you to be there." And the little Buddha says, "Of course I'll be there for you all the time. Just come and visit anytime you need." That is the practice of touching the Buddha inside. It's a very important practice. Not only for children, for all of us.

I love to sit close to children because of their freshness. Every time I hold the hand of a child and practice walking meditation, I always profit from the freshness of him or her. I might offer him or her my stability, but I always profit from their freshness. Holding the hand of a child in mindfulness, offering him some stability, offering her some stability, and receiving a lot of freshness—this is what I love to do. You say, "Dear little Buddha, you are my freshness. Thank you for being there." You have confidence because you have been able to be fresh, many times. If you touch the Buddha, the freshness in you continues to grow. the adults, they also practiced like that. "Dear little Buddha, you are my tenderness." Tenderness is what all of us need and children prove to be tender, many times.

"Dear little Buddha, you are my mindfulness," that is true. Because a Buddha is someone that is made of an energy called mindfulness. To be mindful means to be aware of what is going on, and this is only possible when you are really there. If you are really there one hundred percent, you will be aware of what is going on. This is a very crucial practice.

"Dear Buddha, you are my understanding." True, Buddha is the power of understanding. Because if you are there, you are very alert. You know everything that is going on, that is why you understand things and people very easily. So, "Little Buddha, you are my understanding. I need you very much because I know that understanding is the base of love." If you don't understand someone, you cannot love him or her. That is why understanding is so crucial. Cut out: What is meditation? Meditation is s...

[Tape ends abruptly here, then after a few seconds continues further along into the talk]

[Begins in mid sentence]

...you are not practicing the right kind of meditation. You may be only trying to escape the difficulties and the problems around you or inside of you. "Dear little Buddha, you are my love. You are the capacity of loving." Children, of course, have the capacity to love. If they touch that capacity every day, their love will grow, their capacity of loving will grow, and they are on the way of realizing fully the Buddha within.

So you practice sitting there and you touch these qualities of the Buddha in you. You touch the real Buddha, not the Buddha made of plaster or copper or even emerald. For the practitioner, Buddha is not a god. Buddha is not someone outside in the sky, on a mountain. Buddha is alive, that is a living Buddha that is in us. Tell me of a person who does not possess the nature of Buddha within him or her. No. In Mahayana Buddhism, the most important message of all the sutras is that everyone has the capacity of being a Buddha. The capacity of loving, understanding, and being enlightened. That is the most important message of all sutras.

So this is a very deep practice. You may spend only three or four minutes on this practice. You may like to put your fingers on your heart and you practice visiting the Buddha inside. The Buddha is in your heart, also everywhere in your body, not only in your heart. In your stomach, also. Sometimes you feel that fear is in your stomach, but you should know that the Buddha is in your stomach at the same time. It is up to you to choose.

After a few minutes of practice like that, you practice alone, or together with a few friends. You say, "Dear Buddha, it is very comfortable to know that you are there." The Buddha always says, "Of course I am always there for you. But please visit more often." Because every time you visit the Buddha, the Buddha in you profits. The Buddha in you will have more space and air to breathe. Because during the day you may have suffered a lot and you throw into yourself anger, hatred, frustration, suffering. So you deprive the Buddha of fresh air to breathe inside. So your little Buddha may be suffocating a little bit inside. But every time you practice touching the Buddha, you bring in a lot of space, of air. The Buddha within you has a chance to grow. It is very important. Sitting meditation that is for what? Walking meditation that is for what? That is to give to the Buddha inside a chance to grow.

"Dear little Buddha, I need you very much," and the little Buddha in you will say, "Dear one, I also need you very much. Please come and visit more often." This practice is called recollection of the Buddha and is taught in every school of Buddhism. You touch the Buddha, you touch all the qualities of the Buddha, and you know that the Buddha is absolutely real—not as an idea, not as a notion, but as a reality. Our task, our life, our practice, is to nourish the Buddha and give ourselves and the people we love a chance.

Please write down the practice in short, complete sentences to make it available for other children who are not sitting today in this Dharma hall, so that they can practice with you also. The children should stand up and bow

[Bell—Children leave Dharma hall].

On the sixteenth of this month I started our summer opening with a Dharma talk where I said that it's very important to allow our body and our minds to rest. Our body may still carry a lot of wounds inside, and our consciousness also; it may carry a lot of wounds inside. They need healing. The basic condition for all healing is to be able to rest, but we don't have the capacity to rest. We have the habit of running, of doing things. That is why to meditate is first of all to learn how to rest, to give your body and your mind a chance to rest and to heal themselves. It seems to be a very simple thing, but we need training to be able to do that.

I said that when an animal living in the forest is wounded, it always tries to look for a quiet place to lay down for many days and allow the wound to heal. During these days the animal does not think about eating or anything else. That is the practice of all animals in the forest every time they get wounded by another animal or by other kinds of things, including disease. That wisdom we have to learn. There are wounds within our body. We may have diseases; we may even have cancer or other difficulties that we think to be incurable. We may have blocks of suffering in our consciousness. We may have despair, fear, and confusion, but we know that our body has the capacity of healing itself if we allow it a chance to rest. This is not only true for our body but also for our soul.

Our consciousness knows and has the capacity of healing itself—only if we allow it the chance, that is, to allow it to rest, to authorize it to rest. When we cut our finger we are not so afraid, we know that our body can heal itself. So we just clean the wound, protect it from the dirt, and the battle is from inside and in just twenty-four hours we can heal it. Our body knows how to create antibodies to protect itself. We have to believe in our body. We have to allow our body a chance to rest. Many difficult diseases may be healed just by our capacity of resting. This we have to learn. In the practice of Buddhism there are many things like that to learn. The sutra on mindful breathing, for instance, is more than enough for you to heal yourself. If you know how to practice exercises brought to you by the Buddha, you know how to do it, to enjoy doing that, you give your body a chance to heal and also your consciousness.

You have had the experience of utmost suffering—something happened to you and you did not believe that you could survive that. How could you survive such bad news, pain? And yet, you have survived. You have gone through that period and you've proved to be able to survive that kind of suffering. It means your consciousness knows the way to survive. You say, "Time heals." But time alone cannot heal your suffering. It is not because you are acquainted with the suffering that you are healed. No. It is because of the fact that your consciousness knows the way to heal itself. You have to trust it because in your consciousness there is the Buddha, there is a seat of love, of understanding. If you allow them to manifest, then your consciousness will be able to heal itself.

Talking to a therapist, talking to a teacher, talking to Dharma brothers and sisters, allows these wholesome energies to be touched, to give them a chance to become more apparent. They will take care of the healing. Sometimes we speak about a "talking cure," but the talking cannot cure. The talking—the most it can do—is to allow yourself to have confidence in your own ability to heal yourself. So it's very important that during that time we spend with a Sangha, a Dharma teacher, we have to learn the techniques of allowing our body and our soul to rest. The heart of the Buddhist practice is to stop—to stop running, to stop preventing our body and our soul from resting.

Many people believe that they need to go for holidays. They struggle; they do everything in order to have these holidays. But during these holidays do they really rest? They are much more tired after the holidays. So everyone has to learn the art of resting, of restoring. Your Dharma teachers, your Dharma brothers and sisters, they know how to practice resting and healing. When you practice fasting for instance, you allow your stomach, intestines, liver, kidneys, to rest. You are not afraid of fasting, because you know that there is a reservoir, a reserve, of nutrition in your body. You can go on a fast of two or three weeks without eating and not lose your strength. Those of us who have tried the practice of cleaning our digestive system, we know that. We just drink water. We just rest.

We continue to enjoy our sitting meditation, walking meditation. We don't feel that we lose any energy at all. Our bowels, given time to rest for ten days or two weeks, can heal themselves. We have to believe in such things because we have practiced it and other people have practiced it—it proved to be the truth. Healing is possible only on the days of resting.

Now how about our consciousness, our mind? What kind of practice should you do, or what kind of non-practice should you do in order for your soul and your consciousness to be able to rest? We should not lose our time in getting ideas, even very wonderful ideas, about enlightenment, nirvana, Buddhahood, or things like that. We should

get to the real thing, to the bones of the practice. How to start? With *samatha*. Samatha is just stopping. You stand in front of a young tree. You look at the young tree. You stand in front of the tree in such a way that you can stop. You breathe in and out in such a way that you can stop completely running in your mind and in your body.

Last year when we visited China, we saw on crossroads the sign, "stop." And the Chinese word, "stop," is exactly the word that the Chinese people use to translate the word "samatha." One day I stood in front of a sign like this and I practiced breathing and smiling to it. And I completely stopped. It was like standing in front of the Buddha who made the sign to tell you to stop. You are breathing, you are standing there, but you have stopped completely. It is a wonderful thing to be stopped. With stopping like that, calm becomes something possible. Peace becomes something possible and of course healing. As long as you continue to run—running to look for something or running to escape something—it is still running. You have not stopped you have no peace. So learning how to stop is extremely important. Because stopping, being calm, being peaceful, is the precondition for deep looking, which is *vipasyana*. Vipasyana is insight practice, contemplation, looking deeply. Meditation is made of stopping, calming and looking deeply. Stopping helps you to rest, to calm, to have peace, to provide the basic condition for healing. Then looking is something you can do easily once you have stopped. Looking into the nature of your illness, looking into the nature of your pain, you begin to have the insight you begin to understand. That understanding relieves you from the pain completely. That is called salvation by knowledge. We don't speak about salvation by grace in Buddhism. We speak about salvation by knowledge, by understanding, *prajña*. *Prajñāpāramitā* means the kind of understanding that carries you to the other shore, the other shore of no-suffering.

[Bell]

One of the deepest insights that you may try to obtain is the insight on no-self. But no-self is not a theory, a doctrine, a philosophy. No-self is only the insight that has to be touched directly with your practice. As practitioners we should not talk about no-self in such a way that it will have nothing to do with our daily life. I have recommended that all friends who come here to Plum Village during this summer learn and practice the practice of Earth-touching. Touching the Earth is one of the many practices we do in Plum Village in order to touch the nature of our non-self. It is very healing. It heals body and mind. We should practice it every day.

You hold your hands like this [palms together in front of chest] and stand in front of something like a tree, or the blue sky, or a dandelion, or the statue of the Buddha, anything—because everything has the Buddha inside, has the ultimate dimension inside—to bow to anything is fine, to the moon, to the morning star. You produce your true presence, and be there with one hundred percent of yourself. Then you bow down and you touch the earth. Touch the earth with your feet, with your arms, with your forehead. Touch deeply, don't do it halfway. Because this is an act of surrender. Surrender what and surrender to what? This is the act of surrendering the self, the idea of self. Because you think that you are a separate entity that is the basic cause for your suffering. When you touch the earth deeply—the earth may be your mother, your father, your ground of being, yourself—you surrender the idea that you are a separate thing. You smile and you open your palms. The act of opening your palm like this and facing inward, it means that I'm nothing. There is nothing. My intelligence—we're very proud of our intelligence. Our talents. Our diplomas. Our position in society. We may be proud of many things we have or we are, but when we are in that position we smile and we know, we know that all these things have been handed down by our ancestors.

If you have a beautiful voice, don't think that you have created that beautiful voice for yourself. It has been transmitted by your ancestors, your parents. If you have the talent of a painter, don't think that you have invented that talent. It has been transmitted to you as a seed. So everything you have thought that you are has come from the cosmos, from your ancestors. So during the first touching of the earth you link yourself with the cosmos. The water in you, the heat in you, the air in you, the soil in you, belong to the water outside, the soil outside. Without the forest how could you be? Without your father and mother how could you be there this moment? Therefore you say, in wisdom, that you are nothing. Everything that you think, you thought that you are, you have received from the cosmos, from parents—including your body. Suddenly non-self arises as an insight. You belong to the stream of life. If you bear hatred toward your father, you think that your life has been ruined by your father, that you don't want to have anything to do with your father. It is out of ignorance that you have thought so. Because if you touch the reality of no-self, you see very clearly that you are your father. You are just a continuation of your father, and your father is a continuation of your grandfather.

We are one in a stream of life. To think that you are a separate entity, that you are a self that can be independent from your father, is a very funny thing. Because your father is inside you, you can never get rid of him. There is no alternative except to reconcile with your father. To reconcile with him means to reconcile with yourself. You have

a chance to do so now with the practice. The other person, it might not be your father; he may be your brother or your spouse or anyone. You think that he or she has made you suffer so much, has made your life miserable. There is a tendency in you never to see him again, to hear from him again or from her again. That kind of willingness, that kind of feeling is born from your ignorance of the reality of no-self. Because we are all together. Not only are we together, we are inside each other, we inter-are. So during the first act of Touching the Earth you surrender your idea of self, and suddenly you release a lot of suffering, a lot of anger. You give yourself a chance for compassion and understanding to be born in your heart.

When you make a prostration like that you are not invoking a god to come and save you. To save yourself. But it is really a practice of wisdom. You touch the earth in order to release, to let go of your notion of self and to get insight that you belong to the same stream of life, reality. Suddenly you see that it is possible for you to make peace with that person. Making peace with him means making peace with you. Strange, because my peace depends very much on his peace or her peace. If I devote time, energy, to help him, to help her to suffer less, suddenly I have more peace and more happiness. I do not have the intention to do it for me. But I get all the results.

When you see a small insect in danger, you spend half a minute to rescue the insect. You think that you are doing that for its sake, out of your compassion. But while you do that you cultivate the compassion inside you and happiness becomes yours. What does it mean to be compassionate? To me, to be compassionate means to be able to relate to other living beings. When you are able to relate to other living beings your loneliness, your feeling of being cut off, will disappear. So, compassion is for whom—for these living beings or for you? The answer is, for both. Any word, any thought, any act, born from that insight of no-self, brings healing and reconciliation within you and around you. There are friends who have practiced the Five Prostrations and the Three Prostrations who have reported that the practice is very effective, that those who practice just one hour get a big relief, and continue to cry and cry during the first hour of practice. You already know when you practice like that you do not invoke, call upon a god to help you, but you touch reality. You touch understanding. You touch prajña that is able to free you. So stopping, resting, is for healing. Looking deeply, touching the insight of no-self is also for healing, for liberation. That is the essence of Buddhist meditation.

Are you interested in realizing your Buddha nature in you, in suffering, in enlightenment? But, that Buddha nature, that suffering, that enlightenment, do they have anything to do with your suffering, your illness? I would not be interested in Buddha nature, enlightenment, awakening, if these have nothing to do with my suffering, my liberation. I only do the practices that can help me to rest, to heal and to liberate myself.

Our practice should be concrete, effective. We should not allow a practice to go on for a long time without bringing us any relief, any transformation. That would not be an intelligent way of practicing. When a farmer, after having used a certain kind of seeds or fertilizer, or methods of agriculture, does not get the results he wants, he would be intelligent enough to change. Meditators have to be like that. If having tried a certain method for some time they do not feel any change, any transformation, they should inquire again. They should learn again from their teachers, their brothers in the Dharma, their sisters in the Dharma, in order to get the right methods. According to the Buddha, the Dharma is effective right away—if you get the right Dharma, like mindful breathing. The moment when you begin breathing in mindfully you already get the result of such a practice. You get the concentration. You get the stopping. What is the use of breathing in if you cannot stop and rest? If you don't feel more concentrated, why do you have to bother yourself? To suffer because of the practice of breathing in and out, is nonsense. So if you are breathing in and out, and feel concentrated and restful and calm and producing your true presence, you know that the practice is correct and you already enjoy the fruit of the practice.

Walking meditation: Why do we have to walk slowly like that? Why do you have to compose yourself in slowing down like that? It does not look natural. In the beginning, people around the practice center always say, "They don't seem to live in the real world. They like to live in a dream, they walk so slowly." That is a first impression because in the world people always run. They don't know the art of stopping. They don't know the art of living deeply each moment of their life. So when they see a nun or a monk or a lay person walking, looking, smiling like that, they don't feel it's normal. They feel it's abnormal. There's one villager in the New Hamlet, she said she was very, very surprised and shocked when she saw a nun walking slowly who stopped and looked at the garbage. What is the use of looking at the garbage like that for a long time? What is normal and what is abnormal? There are people who have demonstrated that after just a few hours or a few days of staying in Plum Village they begin to like the practice. Because for the first time they know how to stop. To be able to stop is a wonderful thing, because they may have been running for the last 3,000 years.

[Bell]

Please, when you breathe in, do not make an effort of breathing in. You just allow yourself to breathe in. Even if you don't breathe in it will breathe in by itself. So don't say, "My breath, come, so that I tell you how to do." Don't try to force anything, don't try to intervene, just allow the breathing in to take place. What you have to do is be aware of the fact that the breathing in is taking place. And you have more chance to enjoy your in-breath. Don't struggle with your breath that is what I recommend. Realize that your in breath is a wonder. When someone is dead, no matter what we do, the person will not breathe in again. So we are breathing in, that is a wonderful thing. Breathing in I know I'm alive it's a miracle. We have to enjoy our in-breath. There are many ways to enjoy your in-breath. We want you to tell us how you enjoy your in-breath, whether in a sitting position or in a walking position. But if you don't enjoy breathing in, breathing out, you don't do it right.

This is the first recommendation on breathing that the Buddha made. When breathing in, I know this is the in-breath. When breathing out, I know this is the out-breath. When the in-breath is long, I know it is long. When it is short, I know it is short. Just recognition, mere recognition, simple recognition of the presence of the in-breath and out-breath. When you do that, suddenly you become entirely present. What a miracle, because to meditate means to be there. To be there with yourself, to be there with your in-breath. So you now understand the two sentences, "Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know I am breathing out." And a few minutes later, "Breathing in I know my in-breath has become deep. Breathing out, I know my out-breath has become slow." That is not an effort to make the in-breath deeper or the out-breath slower. That is only a recognition of the fact. These instructions will be used for our walking meditation right after the Dharma talk. After having followed your in-breath and out-breath for a few minutes you will notice that your in-breath and out-breath now have a much better quality, because the image of mindfulness, when touching anything, increases the quality of that thing. The Buddha when he touches something, reveals and increases the quality of being of that thing. Mindfulness is the Buddha therefore it plays that role.

When you look at the full moon, and if you are mindful, "Breathing in I see the full moon, breathing out I smile at the full moon," suddenly the full moon reveals itself to you maybe one hundred times more clearly. It's more beautiful, it's clearer it's more enjoyable. Why? Because the moon has been touched by mindfulness. So when you touch your in-breath and out-breath with your mindfulness, your in-breath becomes more harmonious, more gentle, deeper, slower, and so does your out-breath. Now you enjoy in-breathing and out-breathing. Naturally your breathing becomes more enjoyable, the quality of your breathing increases. So "In/Out" is for the beginning. [Thây writes on blackboard.] Then "Deep/Slow" is the next step: "Breathing in, I know that my in breath has become deep and I enjoy it. Breathing out, I see that my out-breath has become slow and I enjoy it."

During that time you have stopped, you have allowed your body and your mind to rest. Even if you are walking, you are resting. If you are sitting, you are resting. You are not struggling anymore, on your cushion, or walking. Then later on you will try this. These words are only to help you to recognize what is happening. "Calm/Ease: Breathing in I feel the calm in me." This is not autosuggestion, because if you have enjoyed In/Out and Deep/Slow, calm is something that is established. Resting. If you touched your calm, your calm rose. It's like when you touched the moon. "Breathing out, I feel ease in me." I don't suffer anymore. I will not make it hard anymore. Don't be too hard on yourself. Allow yourself to be at ease with yourself. Don't struggle. All of these can be done even if lots of suffering is still in your body and in your soul. Doing this, we are taking care of them. We are not trying to escape the pain in us. We are giving our body and our consciousness a rest.

"Smile/Release: Breathing in I smile." In Plum Village we speak about "mouth yoga," you just try to smile and then you realize the relaxation of the many hundreds of muscles on your face. According to the law of cause and effect when you have joy you smile. Or when you smile you release all the tension on your face. The first case is cause and effect. The second case is also cause and effect. So why do you have to wait for joy to take the initiative? Why don't you allow your mouth to take the initiative? Do you practice some kind of discrimination against your body? You know that the moment when you sit down and rest you feel much better in your soul. So the body can always take the initiative if you allow it to be. And to practice meditation, you don't practice it only with your mind, but also with your body. The Buddha said it is possible to touch nirvana with your body.

"Breathing in, I smile," because there is calm, ease, and the joy of being rested. And "breathing out, I release." I release because there is in me a tendency to continue to run, to struggle. Even in my dream I continue to struggle—that is a habit energy of more than three, four thousand years. I recognize it. It has been transmitted to me by many generations of ancestors. So now I'm practicing for them. If I can stop and release, then all my ancestors in me get

liberated. You are doing it for everyone, because you are not a self. And you are doing it out of love.

The last is, "Present moment/Wonderful moment." To be walking on earth and realizing that you are alive, dwelling in the present moment. You see, to be alive and to be walking on earth is already a miracle. Because you have been running to look for your happiness, you may not know that happiness is available in the here, and the now. Conditions for your happiness may be more than enough in the here and the now. That is the result of the practice of stopping—stopping to realize that you are wonderful like this. You can be happy right now.

"Present moment," because that is the only moment for us to live. If you miss the present moment, you miss your appointment with life. The Buddha said life is available only in the present moment. "Wonderful moment," that is life that you touch. Suddenly happiness becomes possible. Being alive, walking with the Sangha, touching the blue sky, the earth, breathing in and out freely, allowing us to rest body and consciousness is already a wonderful thing. Do we need a deeper practice? A more difficult practice? More complicated kind of practice? I don't think so. Because for those of us who have practiced forty, fifty years already, we continue to practice like this or something similar to this, and we always get more peace and joy and happiness. Our insight always continues to grow. You don't have to look for an "intensive" course of meditation, or a "high" level of meditation, or "intensive" or "high" practice. Lin-Chi, the founder of the Rinzai School of meditation, said, "The miracle is not to walk on fire or on thin air, the miracle is to walk on earth." If mindfulness is there, you are performing the miracle of being alive in each moment.

So please, my friends, now it is time for us to enjoy walking together. When you hear the bell, enjoy your in-breath and out-breath. We will take time to enjoy also going to the bathroom. After that we gather around the linden tree. We start walking together. Walking meditation, I consider it to be an act of life-celebrating. To walk together as a Sangha, enjoying every step we make, feeling alive, is really the celebration of life. Don't consider it to be hard or hard practice.

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# **The Blooming of the Lotus:**

## **The Nature of No-birth and No-death**

**By Thich Nhat Hanh**

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Today is the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, 1998, and we are in the Upper Hamlet in our spring retreat. Today is the first of three dharma talks to be given in English.

Last year during the summer there were so many children, who came from many countries, and I offered each of them one lotus seed sent to me from Vietnam, and each little boy or little girl came up here and received one lotus seed. I gave them instructions on how to plant the lotus seed, and this year they are going to come back and report to me how they have done. You know that in Plum Village we have lotus ponds in the Upper Hamlet, in the Lower Hamlet and also in the New Hamlet, and each summer we see so many lotus flowers blooming. That is a joy. It has been a joy for many of us. And many people who come to Plum Village see the lotus flower for the first time in their lives. A reporter from Paris said in a television program that lotus flowers grow like mushrooms in Dordogne. That is not true. The lotus flowers here in Plum Village come from Vietnam in the form of little seeds,

and we have tried to make the lotus flowers bloom in Plum Village. We have succeeded, and this year we have meditated deeply about the nature of no-birth and no-death of the lotus flowers. We will continue to do so throughout the year.

There is a professor of biology in the University of California at Los Angeles. In 1982 she went to China, to visit the Biology Institute of Beijing, and she got five lotus seeds that were described as very, very old. These lotus seeds had been discovered as a result of excavation in North China, where they found many hundreds of lotus seeds. So she was able to receive five of them, and she brought them back to North America. In November 1995, she tried to plant three seeds. One did not grow, and two of them sprouted. The first one, having sprouted, she took it out and she burned it at a high temperature, in order to find out how old the lotus seed was, by a procedure called carbon dating. She found out that the lotus seed was 1,288 years old. It had been kept in the soil for a long time, and it could preserve life for that long period of time. It was amazing.

In order for a lotus seed to sprout you have to cut the skin, or rub the lotus seed against a rock until the skin of the seed becomes very thin in just one place, so that the water can penetrate, and only with the penetration of the water

can the lotus seed sprout. Otherwise the lotus seed will stay there for a long time without sprouting. Or you might use a knife and cut a little bit of the skin so that you allow the water to penetrate into the lotus seed.

There are many seeds that our ancestors have transmitted to us, but if we don't know how to handle these seeds, they will not be able to sprout. We have the seed of enlightenment; we have the seed of compassion, of love, of joy, transmitted by our ancestors, our blood ancestors and also our spiritual ancestors. They are all in us, because our body and our consciousness are the soil containing these seeds. Our practice is to look deeply into our body, into our consciousness, in order to recognize all the seeds that have been transmitted by our ancestors. There are negative seeds, the seeds of suffering, of despair, of discrimination, of anger, but there are seeds of love, of forgiveness, of joy, of enlightenment. That is why in our daily life we should try our best to get in touch with these seeds and try to handle them with care, with love, and with gratitude.

There are some of us who believe that they are not capable of loving, they are afraid of loving, and they believe that the seed of love is not in them. They have tried several times, and they did not succeed in loving. Every time they tried to love they suffered, so they are afraid even of love. Meanwhile, the seed of love in them is very important, it is very strong, and they don't know how to manage the seed of love in them in order for the seed to sprout. Just like a lotus seed, you must know how to handle it in order for the seed to sprout.

So when someone tells you that she is not capable of loving, that there is no love in her, there is no joy in her, there is no happiness in her, you have to look at her with your compassionate eyes and you say to her, "That is not true my dear, you have the seed of love within yourself, you have the seed of peace, of enlightenment, of forgiveness, within yourself. You have to recognize them; you have to learn how to take good care of them and to help them to sprout. The Buddha is someone that can help you to recognize these seeds and how to make them sprout. Your teacher is also someone who can help you to do this, and the Sangha, with your brothers and sisters, is also capable of helping you to look into yourself and recognize these seeds in you, and to practice in such a way that the seeds will have an opportunity to sprout and become flowers.

Many of us recognize the Buddha, *Shakyamuni*, to be one of our spiritual ancestors, and we call ourselves Buddhists because we recognize the Buddha as a teacher, an ancestor, a big brother on the path. And we know that he has transmitted to us so many wholesome seeds. The Buddha has transmitted so many positive seeds that humanity has not been able to use them all. There are seeds that need very special circumstances to sprout. Unless there is a fire in the forest, the skin of these seeds cannot be burned, and the seeds cannot sprout. Everywhere, like in North America, there is a kind of tree that gives out seeds that cannot be sprouted unless there is a fire. And after the fire there is always rain. The fire will burn the skin of the seed, and when the rain falls the seed has an opportunity to sprout.

I have always taught that the war in Vietnam was a big fire, and during that big fire many wonderful seeds transmitted by the Buddha were able to sprout. After the fire there is always rain, and one of the seeds that sprouted during the war in Vietnam is the seed of engaged Buddhism, Buddhism engaged in our daily lives. We bring Buddhism into the situation of utmost suffering in our lives, and we find that it works. Buddhism can relieve the suffering. Buddhism need not be only in the monastery--Buddhism can be brought into the situation of utmost suffering. The expression "engaged Buddhism" was born in Vietnam during the war, and I was one, among others, who promoted the teaching of Engaged Buddhism. Where there is suffering, Buddhism must be there, in order to serve. And the seed of the practice will help us not to surrender to despair, to continue so that peace and reconciliation can become a reality.

I remember one day that many young people came to me with a lot of despair. It was in Vietnam about 1962 or 1963, and they sat around me and they looked at me and they said, "Thay, do you think that there is a chance for peace at all? Because we have been working very hard for peace, but there is no sign of peace in sight." By that time it was very difficult for me to give an answer, because I also felt very much the same way: we had struggled, we had worked very hard to end the war, we had done everything we could, yet the situation did not seem to move at all. And the seed of despair was there, very strong in all of us. So when I saw young people looking at me and asking the question, I could not answer right away. I knew that I had to give an answer from my heart, but in my heart there was not a lot of hope. The element of despair was much bigger.

In *Tra Loc*, a village where our Buddhist social workers used to work hard, the airplanes came and bombed, and destroyed the village that we had built. *Tra Loc* is in *Quang Tri* Province, not very far from my native village. It was very close to the Demilitarized Zone. In the vicinity of Saigon we had the School of Youth for Social Service.

We trained young social workers and sent them to the countryside in order to rebuild the villages that had been destroyed by the bombing in the war. And among these young social workers were many young monks and nuns. We practiced engaged Buddhism, we did not practice only in the meditation hall, but we practiced right in the war zone. And a number of us died during service. So *Tra Loc* was one of the villages where we went to work: we built the village of *Tra Loc* and after that it was bombed to zero. The social workers sent news to Saigon and asked me whether they should rebuild the village or not, and I said, "Rebuild it." So our social workers rebuilt the village with the villagers, and not long after that the village was bombed again, for the second time.

You know how we felt when we heard news like that from our headquarters situated in the vicinity of Saigon. We could not afford to allow the seed of despair to overcome that is why we decided to rebuild it again. And we had to invest a lot of workers, time, energy, and even money in order to rebuild the village. And after that it was bombed for the third time, and yet with a lot of suffering in our hearts we decided to rebuild it for the third time. There was speculation that we were not very intelligent—why rebuild something that will be destroyed? We heard this kind of criticism, but we could not afford to have the seed of despair overwhelm people; that is why we gave the order to rebuild again. It was about that time that the young people came to me, and they sat around me and they looked at me, and they said, "Thay, do you think we have any hope at all? Will the war ever end?" And I looked at them, and I knew I could not tell a lie. If I allowed my despair to burst out, then all these young people would be drowned in the ocean of despair, so I sat very still and I practiced mindful breathing, and I contemplated impermanence, non-self. Everything is impermanent, including the war: the war has to end someday. So when I saw that I said, "My dear friends, the war is going to end, because everything is impermanent. The war is impermanent, therefore the war has to end some day. Let us try to keep the seed of hope alive. We have to hold to each other in order to continue." And it came from my heart, from my meditation.

I had a disciple whose name was *Nhat Tri*. He was a monk, a young monk, and he was an excellent social worker in the School of Youth for Social Service. One day he was walking in the city of Saigon, and an American soldier standing on a military truck spat on his head. At that time the press and other media tried to describe the Buddhists as supporting the Communists, and disguised as Buddhists in order to defeat the American forces in Vietnam. That is why the American military men saw Communists everywhere, and they saw a Buddhist monk and they thought that this monk must be a disguised Communist, so out of anger the soldier spat on the head of Brother *Nhat Tri*. And Brother *Nhat Tri* was deeply hurt. He came home and he cried a lot, and he could not contain his anger. He said that he was going to join the National Liberation Front to fight the Americans. And I had to hold him for a long time, maybe ten or fifteen minutes, and I said, "My son, my child, you were not born to hold a gun. You were born in order to hold compassion, a lotus flower. It is with a lotus flower that you can best serve humanity and your people. Violence will lead to violence. You have to stick to our conviction that only compassion, love and understanding can respond to hate and violence." After that he agreed to stay on with the School of Youth for Social Service. He is the big brother of many monks and nuns here, but he was lost in mission, and we could not find him anymore.

Finally the war ended, and many of us were not allowed to continue our service in a formal way, because the new government did not allow us to continue social service. They said they don't need us. The School of Youth for Social Service was not allowed to continue, so we organized the kind of work, which is considered to be without form. Our social workers continue to help people, but silently, and over here our friends try to support the work in Vietnam in several ways. They have continued to work without having a name, without having a form, until today. Working like that is to continue to nourish the seed of compassion, of love, of understanding, in each of us. We continue to help villagers to build schools and bridges. We have built quite a lot of bridges called "The Bridge of Understanding," "The Bridge of Love." We have continued to build schools with the assistance of the villagers, and we have invented the time of "school –home," where the children come and live for one day, the whole day there, and have a meal at noon. And they go home to sleep. The next morning they come back to learn, and at mealtime they have a meal, and we try to give each of them one glass of milk a day. A glass of milk is very important because many children are undernourished, and one glass of milk is very helpful. I always tell my students here that they can do a lot, they don't have to feel helpless because there are many things they can do: to offer a child in a poor village in a remote area a glass of soy milk or cow milk is very important. And our social workers, who take the children in the morning, and feed them at noontime, they put their love into the work. They cook lunch in such a way that the lunch can provide some nutrition, so the children will not suffer malnutrition. They always try to provide a glass of milk.

My mother came from a village not very far from *Tra Loc*, the name of the village is *Ha Trung*. It's a very poor village, and once when I looked very deeply at the faces of many children in the village, little boys and little girls,

each little girl became my mother. My mother had been a little girl like that, and if you could give her a glass of milk every day she would be able to give birth to a little boy like me, but if she is not given a glass of milk, then she will not be able to give birth to a healthy child. So I asked my students, my social workers, to take care of the little boys and the little girls in the village, because each of them is my mother, each of them is my father. And that is not only true in the village of *Ha Trung*, but it is true in every village.

If you feel helpless, you cannot do anything for the world. You know that that feeling of helplessness should not be there, because in fact there are many ways you can be of service to the world: You can give me a glass of milk when I am still very young, one or two years old, so that in the future I will be able to grow up normally and become a good citizen of my country and of the world. And there are ways to do it, to assist monks and nuns and lay people and social workers in Africa, in Asia, in underdeveloped countries, in order to change the situation in a significant way. There are always dharma doors through which you can enter reality and improve the quality of life.

(Bell)

There is a seed transmitted by the Buddha, that we try to grow here in Plum Village: The teaching on how to live deeply in the present moment, to establish ourselves in the here and the now, to live deeply every moment of our daily life in order to touch the depth of life in every moment *drsta dharma sukha vihari*, 'living happily in the present moment'. There are many Buddhist centers where we practice in order to arrive at a state of being that may only be possible in the future, or we wish to be reborn in the Pure Land of the Buddha after so many years of practice. But the practice in Plum Village is different. We know that the pure land is in the here and the now. Enlightenment, understanding and awakening, all of that should be found in the present moment, and therefore we have to go back to the present moment in order to touch them. If you know how to do that then you can have peace and stability and compassion right away in this moment. Every step you make can bring you stability and freedom and joy. And you can practice so that during the time that you have lunch, peace and stability and joy can be possible also. The teaching of dwelling firmly in the present moment is a kind of seed transmitted by the Buddha, and in Plum Village we try to make it sprout for the happiness, for the joy of so many people.

The teaching of the Buddha is based on the Four Noble Truths and in Chinese it is translated as the Four Holy Truths. And the First Holy Truth is suffering, pain, *dukkha*. The first truth is that suffering *is*. The question may be why suffering is described as a holy truth. What is so holy about suffering? Can we see the element of holiness in suffering? Why do we call suffering a holy truth, when people suffer everywhere? It is because in the teachings of the Buddha, it is by looking deeply into the nature of our suffering that we can find a way out. If you throw away suffering, if you try to run away from your suffering, then you will never have a chance to see the way out of suffering. Stay with your suffering, hold it, and look deeply into it: that is the only way to transform the suffering, to get out of suffering. And that is why suffering is a holy truth. If you allow yourself to be drowned in the ocean of suffering, if you allow suffering to overwhelm you, then suffering will not be holy anymore. Suffering is holy when you know how to handle it. How to embrace it, how to look deeply into it. And the practice is about looking deeply into the nature of our suffering, not trying to run away from it. The moment when you stop running, the moment when you have the courage to look into the nature of your suffering, holiness is there. The moment when mindfulness becomes an energy in yourself, the moment when you use the energy of mindfulness to look into the heart of suffering, the element of holiness is there. Holiness is not something that only the Pope and the Dalai Lama have; holiness is there every time we generate the energy of mindfulness in order to look, and to touch life.

Mindfulness brings about understanding, compassion, and forgiveness, we know that. That is why mindfulness is holy in its nature. When you use the energy of mindfulness to look into suffering, you make the element of holiness real. One day a young man asked Mother Theresa, "Are you a holy person?" and Mother Theresa said, "Yes, and so are you too." And that is true, we all have the seed of holiness within us, and if only we know how to touch the seed of holiness, holiness will become an energy. And to me, mindfulness is one very important seed of holiness. The moment when you begin to walk mindfully, the element of holiness is in you. When you walk mindfully with every step you get more solidity, you get more peace, you get more freedom, and holiness is with you. In the Catholic mass the priest always says, "God be with you," and the audience responds, "And with you too." Here is not a statement, here is not a wish, here is a practice. The moment when you go back to your breath and you breathe mindfully, holiness is there, because mindfulness is the substance of holiness. God is there; the Holy Spirit is there at the same time. And when you sit mindfully, enjoying your breathing, I am sure that the element of holiness is there, protecting you, making life possible at that moment. And when you walk mindfully, the element of holiness is there, protecting you, making you more stable, and more open. And holiness is our practice.

We have to keep the element of holiness alive in every moment of our daily life, for our sake and for the sake of the people around us. The Buddha was a human being, like all of us. Because he practiced mindfulness, concentration and insight, the element of holiness was in him. And in Buddhism we speak of a race called "the race of holy beings".

(Thay writes Chinese characters for "holy truth" and "race of holy beings.")

This is the word for holy truth. It is interesting to see the Chinese mentality. "Holy" is made of an ear, a mouth, and a king. When you become the king of your mouth and your ear, you are holy. When you speak mindfully, when you listen mindfully, you master the art of speaking and listening you are holy person. This is the ear, this is the mouth, and this is the king. You should be the king of your mouth and your ear, and you will not cause a lot of suffering to other people. This is "Holy Truth", and the race of saints. If you belong to a Sangha, a community that practices mindfulness, you belong to the race of the holy people, the Buddha, the bodhisattvas, the patriarchs, the disciples and the disciples of their disciples. They are always devoted to the practice of mindfulness, of concentration and insight; therefore they perpetuate the race of the saints, the holy people. And we have the duty to keep that race continued.

We should not have any kind of complex. Every time we are animated we are inhabited by the energy of mindfulness, the element of holiness is in us. The energy of mindfulness, can be described as the energy of the Holy Spirit, because when you are animated by the Holy Spirit you are alive, you are compassionate, you have the power to understand, to forgive. And the same thing is true with the energy of mindfulness: when you are mindful you are attentive, you are concentrated, and therefore you have the capacity of seeing things deeply, of understanding, of accepting, of forgiving, of loving. Our practice is to be holy in every moment of our daily lives. When I see you walking mindfully, or doing things mindfully, I am inspired by your being, and I begin to be mindful myself. That is why it's very important that when our friends come to Plum Village they see everyone walking mindfully, doing things mindfully, and breathing mindfully, or cooking mindfully. By being mindful you are capable of living deeply each moment of your daily life. You get the protection, you are able to forgive, to understand and to accept and to be compassionate towards the people around you. The sunshine embraces all vegetation and it helps the vegetation to grow and to become green. The energy of mindfulness is like that also. If we allow the energy of mindfulness to be within ourselves, every minute, every second of our daily life will be deep, and peace and stability and freedom can be there for us and for the people who live around us.

(Bell)

Enlightenment, compassion and understanding should not be abstract ideas -- they should become reality in our daily lives. When you pay attention to your in-breath and out-breath that is already a form of enlightenment. Breathing in, I know I am breathing in, breathing out I know I am breathing out, and I enjoy my breathing. That is already the beginning of enlightenment. There are so many people who breathe in and breathe out and yet they don't know that they are breathing in and out. When you breathe in, you know that you are breathing in and you feel that you are alive. And to know that you are alive is a wonderful thing to practice, because so many people live and yet they are not aware that they are alive. To be alive, and to know that you are alive, is the greatest of all miracles. When you sit, breathe in and become aware of the fact that you are still alive. There will some day be a moment when you are about to die, and no matter what you try you will not be able to stand up and sit and enjoy your breathing in and out, and enjoy your mindful walking anymore. And no matter what your friends try to do they will not be able to help you to stand up and make steps like you do during walking meditation. So during the time you sit, or you walk, become aware of the fact that you are alive. To be still alive, and breathing in and out and making steps on this planet is a wonderful thing, and that is already an enlightenment; that enlightenment brings a lot of joy and peace to you.

When you are mindful, you are fully present. When you are fully present, life is available to you. When you drink a glass of water mindfully, you are there, one hundred percent of yourself. And since you are there one hundred percent of yourself, the glass of water is also there one hundred percent of itself, and the encounter between you and the water is very deep. The fact that you drink the glass of water in mindfulness is a holy thing in itself. There are many ways of drinking your water, but there is only way that can make life possible, that can make yourself and the water holy, and that is to drink it mindfully, and you know that you can do it. Every time you lift up a glass of water and drink it, drink it in mindfulness that is your practice.

And when you have your lunch, spend one hour or forty-five minutes eating in such a way that every moment of

your lunch becomes a holy moment. You are totally yourself, you are totally present, so the lunch is present, and the community with whom you share the meal is also a holy community. During that time all of us are protected by the energy of mindfulness. We generate the energy of mindfulness that will protect us, that will make life deep, and anyone who comes and touches the Sangha in that moment will touch holiness, and they will have a chance to go back to themselves, also generating the energy of mindfulness. So remember what Mother Theresa said to the young man, when he asked her, "Are you a holy person?" and she smiled without complex and she said, "Yes, I am, and you are too." Everyone can be a holy person when they are mindful, when they are truly present and living deeply every moment of their daily life.

The energy of mindfulness carries within itself the energy of concentration. This is easy to understand. When you look at something mindfully, when you drink some water mindfully, you are concentrated on what you see and what you drink, and therefore mindfulness is pregnant with concentration. And if you live concentrated in every minute of your daily life, then insight will come, because when you are concentrated you begin to see things more deeply. The true nature of reality will reveal itself to you, and when you can see things deeply like that, you will no longer make mistakes. You will no longer be a victim of ignorance. Understanding things as they are, free from craving, you will become an instrument of the dharma for the world. Everyone you touch, everything you touch will become holy, just because there is the element of holiness within yourself. Everything, everyone you touch can be healed can be transformed. It is reported that anyone who was touched by Jesus Christ was healed of his or her illness. We can believe it, because in the person of Jesus Christ there was the energy of the Holy Spirit, and when you are motivated, when you are inhabited by the Holy Spirit, you have the power of being there, of looking deeply, of forgiving, of being compassionate, and all these elements have the power of healing. Everyone of us is like that also. If we allow the energy of mindfulness to be born in us, if we know how to live each moment of our daily life mindfully, then the elements of concentration, insight, liberation, compassion will be in us, and everyone we touch will be healed, everything we touch will recover its beauty and sanity. So our practice is crucial, and the Buddha has instructed us on how to practice mindfulness, concentration and insight.

We should learn to live and practice as a Sangha, as a family, and this is very important. When you look into a lotus pond, you realize that the lotus flowers, the lotus roots, the lotus leaves, they practice very much in the same way: they support each other, they nourish each other. In the beginning, as we say, there were only one or two lotus seeds. And we know how to handle them, and that is why the lotus seeds have sprouted, and now we have two lotus ponds in the Upper Hamlet, one big lotus pond in the Lower Hamlet, and two in the New Hamlet. Now it is the month of May, and lotus leaves begin to show themselves in a kind of rebirth.

Visualize yourself as a lotus leaf, at the surface of the water. You are green, you are beautiful, you breathe, you receive the sunshine, and you grow. Underneath you are connected to the lotus roots. In every moment of your daily life you enjoy the sunshine, you enjoy displaying your beauty, your health, and at the same time you nourish the roots underneath. You are being nourished by the lotus roots, but you also, by your life, nourish the lotus roots. Usually we tend to believe that the leaf is the child of the tree, but in fact the leaf is also the mother of the tree. The water and the minerals brought into the tree by the roots will be sent to every leaf, and the leaves have to work to receive the sunshine and the gas in the air in order to transform the water and the minerals into elaborated sap, to nourish the sap, and to send it back to nourish the trunk of the tree, the root of the tree. So we can say that the tree, the trunk, is the mother of the leaves, but we can say also that the leaves are the mother of the tree – they nourish each other. So it is the lotus root that sends up the young leaf, and by living its life, receiving the sunshine and the gas, and becoming alive in every moment, that young leaf nourishes itself and the roots underneath, and somehow it nourishes the other flowers and leaves as well.

So let us visualize ourselves as a lotus leaf, and in our daily life we practice walking, we practice breathing, we practice smiling, and we practice sitting so we can bloom like a beautiful leaf. At the same time we nourish our teacher, we nourish our younger brother, we nourish our big sisters. And that really is what we do every day. You are connected to every member of the Sangha in a very wonderful way, and you have to be able to see it. Every smile you make, every compassionate look you can offer can bring joy to your teacher, to your brothers and to your sisters. It is not for you alone, it is for all of us. Every time you are capable of overcoming an irritation, and you can smile, you nourish all of us. Not only do you nourish yourself, but you also nourish all of us. Every time you can address your words with kindness and compassion to your brother or your sister in the Sangha, you are really nourishing us, you are bringing a lot of joy, a lot of nutrition to all of us. And in fact we inter-are.

On the surface it looks like this flower and this leaf are two different entities, but if you go deep into reality, you know that this is because that is, and that is because this is. That is the teaching of inter-being. The flower also

displays her beauty; the flower also fabricates the lotus seeds. But you cannot say that only the flower fabricates the lotus seeds. You, as a leaf, fabricate the lotus seed also, because while you are there you are nourishing the whole Sangha of lotus roots, and that is how you contribute to the manufacture of lotus seeds. You cannot say that only the lotus flower makes lotus seeds, all the roots and all the leaves contribute to making the lotus seeds. So you are nourishing the whole Sangha by your being there and by your practice. You have to see yourself in every member of the Sangha. And you are extremely important. If you suffer, if you experience a setback, the whole Sangha will receive that. And if you are capable of being joyful, of being liberated, then it will be for the sake of all of us in the Sangha. So not only do you live for yourself, but you live for all of us, and you produce not only a flower, you also produce many other leaves and flowers. And it continues. And that is why when the time comes for you, this leaf, to disintegrate, you continue to be in the flower, in the roots, in other leaves. So there is no birth, no death, there is only a continuation, and the Sangha has been like that for two thousand and five hundred years.

So if you are someone who has just joined the community, the Sangha, you should practice looking deeply in order to see that when you come with us in Plum Village and become a member of the Sangha, you can become one with us, because your practice will make our happiness and our growth possible. And the practice of every other member of the Sangha will help you to grow and to be more beautiful. Suppose you are the teacher. As a dharma teacher, in principle you have to help other members of the Sangha to learn the Dharma and to practice the Dharma well; you have the duty to nourish your brothers and sisters in the Dharma, especially the younger brothers and sisters in the Dharma. But from the perspective of inter-being, it can be said the other way around also. Every leaf, every flower is doing the work of nourishing you as well, because each leaf, each flower is breathing, is alive, in order to manufacture the substance of life, nourishing the roots, nourishing other leaves, and nourishing you. So the teacher, while trying to nourish the students, is being nourished by his students as well. It's very clear. When there is a student who is happy, who can smile, who can forgive, who can bloom like a flower, the teacher profits a lot from it, and he or she is nourished by his or her students. It's like the leaves and the tree: the tree is the mother of the leaves, but the leaves are also mothers of the tree. So we inter-are in a very deep way. By being the Sangha we no longer risk to die, or to be born. Birth and death become just appearances.

In winter, we did not see any lotus flowers; we did not see any lotus leaves. Everything seemed to be disintegrating and becoming mud. That is because we looked only from the outside. If we touch deeply the reality of the lotus we know that the lotus roots underneath continue to grow, to get ready for the month of April, of May, and now, when you look into the lotus pond you see that the lotus leaves are beginning to come out again. That is rebirth, that is reappearance, and you can see a continuation, you can recognize yourself. The lotus leaf of last year can recognize herself in the lotus leaf of this year.

All our teachers are within us, all our ancestors are within us. The Buddha is within us. Every time we practice mindful walking, we nourish the Buddha within us. We allow the Buddha to continue to be alive. We need the Buddha of course, but the Buddha needs us to continue. Without us, how could the Buddha continue? This is clear. We need our ancestors to be, our blood ancestors and our spiritual ancestors, but our ancestors need us to be. If we feel free, if we feel solid, our ancestors feel free and solid. They need us very much. Therefore it is our duty to live, to be alive, to live with freedom and stability every day, in order to make it possible for our ancestors to be free and to be stable every day. How about our children and their children? Our children and their children are already in us, and if we know how to practice walking mindfully, breathing mindfully, doing things mindfully with stability and freedom, then we are nourishing our children, even if we don't see them yet. But they are already there within us.

There are two dimensions. First, there is the dimension of time. We are here as the continuation of all our ancestors. All of our ancestors are in us. We are here representing all our children and their children, the future generations also in us. So every minute of our daily life we live for all of them also. You don't see it, but the Buddha needs you in order to be carried to the future generations. The Buddha has been transmitted into many generations, and now that we have received the Buddha within ourselves, the seed of mindfulness, we allow the Buddha to have a chance here, and to have a chance in the future also. So this is the line representing time. And this is another line representing space, those that we can touch in the present moment. Not only are we all our ancestors and all our children, but we are all our brothers and sisters that are here and now in the present moment. And every minute of our daily lives, every thing that we practice is for the sake not only of our ancestors and children, but also for the sake of all our brothers and sisters that are there with us today. If we know how to live like that, despair, loneliness will disappear totally, because we embrace not only time, but also space. We embrace everyone.

*Vimukti* is a Sanskrit word meaning liberation, freedom. Do we have any freedom at all? Is there a seed of freedom in us that we can touch so that we can really enjoy our freedom? Sometimes in our daily lives we have the feeling that we have no freedom at all. Something carries us away from ourselves. We are being pushed all the time by tendencies within us. We tend to be forgetful. We tend to say and to do things that we don't want to say and do. We cannot be ourselves. We cannot be what we aspire to be. We are always defeated by our habit energies. Is there any freedom available to us? Where can we touch our freedom? And where is the key to unlock our freedom in us? We feel that we are always victims of our loneliness, our fear, our anger, and our suffering. And we want to be free from all these afflictions. What is the practice that can help us to be liberated from these kinds of afflictions? The answer is mindfulness, because mindfulness is the only freedom we have. Every day we do things like washing the dishes, washing our clothes, sweeping the floor, cooking, and writing. And we may be just enslaved by doing these things, but the moment we know how to generate the energy of mindfulness, we begin to have the element of freedom in us. Yes, you are scrubbing the floor, like yesterday, but today you do it mindfully. So during the time you scrub the floor like that, you begin to enjoy your liberty. Today you breathe like yesterday, but today you know how to breathe mindfully. I breathe in and I know I am breathing in. I breathe out and I know I am breathing out. The element of freedom becomes possible. That is the only freedom that is available to you. You are yourself; you are not a victim of your habit energy, of the world, of society, of education.

You take a step, and you become aware of the step that you take, and you take that step with freedom, because mindfulness is there in your step. The seed of freedom is there in the form of mindfulness, and that is the only way you can cultivate freedom and become a free person. First of all, you are free from your forgetfulness. Forgetfulness is the kind of veil, the kind of darkness, that overwhelms us, envelops us in our daily life. Forgetfulness is the opposite of mindfulness. And now we have a key in order to unlock the door of freedom, and that is mindfulness. So we should learn how to breathe mindfully, how to walk mindfully, how to drink our water mindfully, how to look at our brother and our sister mindfully, and suddenly the element of freedom is there. Mindfulness is the only liberty we have. And if we continue to cultivate mindfulness, our liberty will grow, and we will be able to transform all our afflictions, including our fear, our sorrow, our anger, and our despair. Mindfulness helps us to see deeply into the nature of ourselves, of our Sangha, and helps us to remove the idea of self, and of mind. The ideas of self, of me and of mine, are ideas that separate, that brings fear and despair. Once we enter into the reality of inter-being, all these fears and despair will vanish, and freedom finally becomes the freedom from fear, from isolation, and from despair.

I take refuge in the Sangha. This is not a statement of faith. I take refuge in the Sangha-- this is a matter of practice. You must be intelligent in order to practice taking refuge in the Sangha. In your daily life you have to look and touch in such a way that you can see that you are one with your brother, you are one with your sister, and every moment of your daily life is to nourish your Sangha, and be nourished by your Sangha. Anything you do for your brother is for yourself is for the Sangha. Everything you do for yourself is also for the Sangha and for your sister. And in the period of one day, twenty-four hours, there are a lot of opportunities for you to touch that truth. You know quite well that if the teacher is not happy, you cannot be happy, if your brother is not happy you cannot be happy, if you are not happy your brother and sister will not be happy. You know the truth of inter-being, and that is why you can practice according to your insight. Everything you do, everything you do not do, has an impact on your Sangha. Building a Sangha means building yourself. If the Sangha has stability and joy, then all of us will enjoy that stability and joy.

A young nun told me that since she has been a nun in Plum Village she has had the opportunity of having her mother, her father, her sister and her brother come to Plum Village and practice. If she had not become a nun, then her family would not have come to visit her and touch the Dharma and the practice here. So being a nun is an opportunity for your family to touch the Dharma and practice the Dharma, and by doing so you nourish not only your Sangha but also your blood family; you bring your family into the Sangha and your Sangha becomes part of your family, and your family becomes part of the Sangha. Practicing being stable, being peaceful, being joyful, you can write a letter home, and when your brother, your sister, your mother read that letter, they will be touched by your wisdom, your joy, and you are doing the work of nourishing your family. So everything you do in your daily life has the power of nourishing your blood family and your spiritual family.

You may not seem to do a lot, but by practicing mindful living in your Sangha, you are helping the world, you are serving the world. Because when we have a Sangha like that, a Sangha full of vitality, of mindfulness, and of understanding, then that will provide hope for many of us in the world. Many in the world are lost, and they don't know where to go. They don't believe that freedom is possible. They don't know that compassion and joy are possible. But when they come into contact with a Sangha that has joy, that has harmony, that has compassion, they



have a chance. They realize that freedom is something possible, compassion is something possible, and joy is something possible, and they are able to find a meaning for their life. Because many people tend to believe that happiness is made of money and sensual pleasures, and they run after money and sensual pleasures and they suffer quite a lot and they don't see any meaning to their life. Now they have a chance, when they come in touch with a Sangha, which has compassion, stability, and freedom, they begin to see a meaning to their life. They may devote their life to the cultivation of freedom, of compassion and of joy. That is why your daily practice is very important, every step you make, every breath you take, everything you do in your daily life in mindfulness will have a tremendous impact on yourself, your Sangha, and on the world.

[End of Dharma Talk]

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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## The Diamond Sutra

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Winter Retreat 1997/98 Thursday 4 December 1997

Dear friends, today is the 4 of December 1997, we are in the New Hamlet in the Winter Retreat. Last time we had begun to study the Diamond Sutra, and we heard the Venerable Subhuti's question as well as the Buddha's answer. This question is a very practical one. Sometimes people ask very theoretical questions which don't relate to the practice in our daily life. Most people have the tendency to be very theoretical whilst Venerable Subhuti's question is very practical. He asked, "If sons and daughters of good families want to realise the most noble aspiration, what should they rely on and what should they do in order to master their thinking?" Again a very practical question.

Before asking the question the Venerable Subhuti gave an observation, saying the Buddha is someone very rare to find because he especially supports and shows great confidence in the bodhisattvas. That is a very important observation. The last time we defined a bodhisattva as someone who has a strong desire and great vow to attempt to relieve the suffering of all beings and to try to bring all beings to the other shore, the shore of liberation, of emancipation. Therefore in the mind and heart of the bodhisattvas there must exist a great energy called Bodhicitta, and because of that energy the Buddha especially gives his support to the bodhisattvas. This is a matter of investments. For example when we have ten acres, five of which have the best soil, we have to use all of our energy to cultivate those five acres first. If we have time, good seeds, good fertiliser then we have to put all these resources and our energy into those five acres first, because those five acres will give us a good harvest. If we put all our energy, time, fertiliser and seeds into the other five acres in which the soil is not so good, then we will not have as abundant a harvest. This is only a matter of using our intelligence and not an issue of discrimination. Therefore the World Honoured One always sets aside time and energy to support those great beings who have a great vow and a great desire. Because if someone has a great aspiration, they can help many people. There is no discrimination only intelligent investing.

If we look in our life we will see the same thing. There are monks and nuns who have great bodhicitta, who have a great desire, great ambition to help other people and do not just think about their future or their own comfort. Those people will get greater support from the sangha and from the teacher, more than the people who just think about their own comfort in their daily life or their own future. And the question of Venerable Subhuti started with that observation. It is a very intelligent observation and a very intelligent question. This student appreciates the teacher, can see the heart and mind of the teacher, and see the value of the teacher's insights. When the World Honoured One replied, he answered directly and said that the authentic bodhisattva is a bodhisattva who embodies two factors in his being: the first factor is the great desire, great ambition, to bring all beings to the shore of liberation. This is called bodhicitta, but having a great aspiration is not enough to be called an authentic bodhisattva. The second thing we have to have is the wisdom of non-discrimination.

The wisdom of non-discrimination is the wisdom that can break the barrier of individualism, with this wisdom we can see that we are the other person and the other person is ourself. The happiness of the other person is our own happiness, and our own happiness is the happiness of the other people, other beings, of plants, animals, and minerals. Sometimes we call it the wisdom of equanimity. 'Samatha' means non-discrimination. The word is different from 'Samatha', the word for stopping. Samatajnana, the wisdom of non-discrimination, means that between the other person and ourself there is no difference. This entity is not completely different from the other entity, and we are all connected to each other and make up one another.

According to Buddhist psychology there are eight consciousnesses. First is the store consciousness, next is manas, and then there is mind consciousness. The five others are based on our five senses: they are sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. The nature of the manas consciousness is discrimination. Manas embraces the store consciousness and calls it 'myself'; it discriminates the self and the non-self. The origin of all discrimination and suffering comes from manas and the fact that our mind consciousness is in turn based on manas consciousness. When we practise we use the mind consciousness and store consciousness to look deeply and to understand the relationship, the connection of all dharmas, their non-self nature. And therefore gradually the manas consciousness is transformed. When we attain final enlightenment, complete liberation, manas consciousness becomes the 'wisdom of non-discrimination'. The purpose of our practice is to attain the wisdom of non-discrimination.

The Buddha said an authentic bodhisattva has to have two factors; first, the energy of bodhicitta and second, the wisdom of non-discrimination. The answer is very clear and direct. A bodhisattva, then, has to have a great vow to bring all the beings to the other shore. "And when all this innumerable, immeasurable, infinite number of beings have become liberated, we do not in truth, think that a single being has been liberated." So there is no one who is liberated, and no one who brings the beings to the other shore. The Buddha has already answered the question of the Venerable Subhuti, but also questioned the Venerable Subhuti and asked "why?" Then the Buddha continued: "If, Subhuti, a bodhisattva holds onto the idea that a self, a person, a living being, a life span exists, that person is not an authentic bodhisattva." And that person doesn't have the wisdom of non-discrimination. The essence of the Diamond Sutra is in this sentence. If we can understand this sentence then the other parts of the sutra are very easy to understand, we can understand the meaning of Diamond Sutra as easily as splitting bamboo.

When we split bamboo, it's only difficult at first because we have to cut through the hard part called 'the eye'. But once we've cut through it then the rest of the bamboo can be split easily. The monks and nuns who have grown up in the West may not so easily understand the saying: "as easy as splitting bamboo". Once you've penetrated the hard part and there is a crack it's very easy to split the whole length of bamboo, through all the sections. So the Diamond Sutra is exactly the same. If we can understand the first part of the sutra then we can understand the other parts easily.

"Subhuti, if a bodhisattva holds onto the idea of a self, a person, a living being, a life span, that person is not an authentic bodhisattva." The sutra mentions four notions we have to clearly understand. We have the notions of self, person, living being, and life span. If we can overcome those four notions then we are an authentic bodhisattva. 'Samjna' means perception, idea, notion or concept. If we look at the Chinese character of the word 'notion', we see there are two parts: the upper part means 'appearance' or 'mark' and the lower part means mind. In our mind there is a mark and we catch that mark, that appearance. The two Chinese characters for 'mark' and 'perception' are closely connected because 'mark' is the object of 'perception', and 'perception' in turn is the subject of 'mark', so we have a 'perception' when our mind is grasping a 'mark'. The first part is 'laksana', object of mind, and the second part is 'citta', mind. When those two are combined we have the word 'Samjna', which means perception, idea, notion, concept. This sutra mentions four marks in which we are caught. And if we cannot liberate ourself from those four notions then we are not an authentic bodhisattva.

For example if we look at this marker pen. In our mind there is an appearance, a mark. Our mind catches this appearance and we have an idea, a perception about it. Our perception of the marker cannot be separated from its mark and vice versa. The subject and the object, depend on each other to co-exist. One makes the other and is made by the other. The marks cause us to have concepts, notions, and perceptions about them. This means that appearance helps the mind to form a notion, a perception, and the mind catches the appearance, the mark to make a notion, a concept. So both are responsible. But usually our perceptions, our notions, are wrong perceptions, wrong notions. For example there are two young people who fall in love when they first meet. The foundation of their love is their perceptions, their notions. When one sees the other they see some appearance of the other. And our loving mind is then created with the help of the appearance of the other. This loving mind grasps at the appearances to form a notion, a perception about the other person. And the object of our love is the appearance of the other person, which we

have created in our mind.

To help us understand this easily we draw a circle which represents reality, suchness, the thing in itself, and we will call it "X". So this reality, suchness, and this other circle "M", is our mind. Our mind looks at this suchness, at the thing in itself, and it cannot understand the true nature of the whole thing, so instead it creates an image of it. So, in our mind we create the image x', and x' is not x. It is our perception that our mind has about x. So when we love someone, we may not love that person, but we love the image our mind has created of that person. And after living together for three years we see that what we loved in the beginning is not the reality now. So the object of our perception is the appearance, and not the thing in itself, it is not the suchness of that thing. If our perception, our notion, is wrong, it is due to our mind having much greed, anger, and ignorance. Since it is the mind of discrimination it is the mind of ignorance. Therefore when we get in contact with something we cannot see it's real nature and we simply create an image about that thing. So when we are angry or upset, we are upset about our own image of it and not the real thing. Our mind is responsible for the image x'. And x' is also responsible for our mind's tendency to grasp.

Our deluded mind (t') comes from true mind (t). Deluded mind is based on true mind, exactly as x', our grasped appearance about something, is based on the reality of the thing x. If our true mind can be in contact with suchness then we are a bodhisattva, a fully awakened person. But most of the time the deluded mind is in contact with the appearance in our mind, creating wrong perception. The nature of the appearance and the perception is ignorance, avidya. Avidya is ignorance or delusion. Our mind is deluded mind, because in it there is the element of ignorance, of delusion. Vidya means light, and a-vidya means lacking light. If the subject is deluded, then the object is also distorted, and thus creates a wrong perception. For example with a fearful panicking mind we can easily mistake a rope for a snake.

In a mind based on ignorance and delusion many afflictions manifest. The two basic afflictions are craving (greed) and anger. Those two afflictions have their basis in our ignorance, our delusion, our deluded mind together with the mistaken image we have in our mind. The image we have is the object of our deluded mind. The perceived and the perceiver. The perception is generally a wrong perception. Because it's a wrong perception we use the word 'concept'. If it were not a wrong perception then we would call it 'wisdom' or 'true reality'. If we have a perception, that perception, that notion can make us suffer. So it's much better if we don't have any notion, any perception. Some perceptions, some notions can make us suffer day and night. If we have a perception, a notion about something then we cannot have peace when we walk, we eat, we rest. And we suffer. The perception, the notion we have about something creates a craving, a desire in ourself, or anger in ourself. And when we have craving or anger, then we lose our peace and joy. Besides greed and anger we also have arrogance, doubt, jealousy, prejudice etc. So the deluded mind is the origin of all these afflictions. For example we have a perception that: "If I can do this I will be very happy." If we have that perception, that idea, then we lose our peace. We work very hard in order to get that, but if the conditions don't allow us to fulfil that dream, that idea, then we suffer. When we practise we can understand the true nature of our deluded mind so that we can liberate ourselves from our suffering.

The World Honoured One didn't talk about many notions, only four. And if we can destroy those four notions then we can attain the wisdom of non-discrimination and we are an authentic bodhisattva. The first notion is the "self". We should understand that the foundation of Buddhism is the wisdom of non-self. Last time, we looked at the wisdom of non-self by looking at the right hand and the left hand. The right hand writes poems and Chinese characters, but it never compares itself with the left hand, and it is never jealous or angry or discriminating against the left hand, because in the right hand there is the wisdom of non-discrimination. So we practise in order to be like the right hand, nothing more than that. And then we will not discriminate self from not self, we won't be thinking there is someone higher or better than we are. We think that we are looking for something outside ourselves, but the wisdom of non-discrimination is already there in our right hand.

Self, what is it? It is our imagining, the creation of our deluded mind. Therefore the Buddha has taught us to meditate about the nature of non-self. When we look at a leaf or a pebble, a cloud, a river or a baby, a society or a human being, we look deeply in order to understand the nature of non-self, so that we can liberate ourselves from the notion of self. For example when father and son are angry at each other, they are able to be angry because the father thinks: "My son is not me", and the son thinks the same way: "My father is not me." But if they both understand that they are both the same entity, the same reality, then it is impossible to get angry with each other, because they are not caught by the idea of self. The practice for monks and nuns is the same. We have a saying: "Brothers and sisters are like hands and feet of a body." Elder brother gets angry with younger brother because he is still caught by a notion of self. When we are liberated from that notion of self then we will not be angry and we can laugh, we can smile. Even if only one of us can liberate ourselves from the notion of self then we will not be upset by other people, it won't matter what the other person does or what the other person says, and gradually the other person will change himself or herself.

The same is true with the any religions, for example; Christianity and Buddhism. In the last century Catholic priests and nuns came to Asian countries. Some of the Buddhists were still caught by the notion of self and were very angry. They thought: "We have our own religion, you don't need to come here." Both sides have a notion about their own religion having the nature of a separate self. The same thing happens now. Some people say: "Why do you bring Buddhism to the West?" They feel they have to defend themselves. Because most of us are still caught by the notion of self. But Buddhism is made only of non-Buddhist elements. If we look deeply we can see that the elements of non-Buddhism have made Buddhism. For example Siddhartha himself, or the great disciples Sariputra, Moggallana, Anathapindika; they weren't Buddhists. So Buddhism is made by non-Buddhist elements. It's exactly the same as a flower. A flower is made from non-flower elements; the sun, the clouds are not flower, soil is not flower, water is not flower. The self is made of non-self elements. It is the same with the other religions. When you look at Christianity it's also made by non-Christian elements. When you can see that then you realise the wisdom of non-self and there is no discrimination between the self and non-self. Mango is different than grapefruit, the Venerable Mahakasyapa is different from the Venerable Ananda. We can distinguish the differences but we don't have any discrimination, and then we liberate ourselves because we are not caught by the appearance, the notion of self.

The World Honoured One is the liberated one because he is not caught in the notion of self. But although he is completely liberated he still uses the language of a human being. He said: "Ananda, that hill is so beautiful, do you want to climb up there with me?" So when the Buddha talks he says "self", "I", "the hill", "Ananda". Ananda is Ananda, the hill is the hill, the Buddha is Buddha, but although he uses those words he doesn't discriminate these are separate entities, and therefore he is able to have freedom, because he has the wisdom of non-discrimination. Just so, when we are the younger brother we are still the younger brother, and when we are the elder brother we are still the elder brother, but it doesn't mean that we are two separate entities, two separate realities. If we are angry, jealous, or upset with our brother, it is because we have the notion of self. But if we look at the person and we are not caught in any appearance, then we understand the non-self in the self and we are liberated. It is not a matter of destroying all appearances; appearances are still there. The key is for us not to be deceived thinking that each is a separate entity. It is only a matter of how we look at everything. In the Diamond Sutra there is a famous sentence: "If you can see the no-mark nature in the mark, then you see the Tathagata." If we understand the nature of non-self then we can see the true nature of big brother, big sister, Ananda. They are all there, they are all different. But if when we look at them we don't see the separate self of those entities, then we are the Buddha.

There is a barrier between self and non-self that is created by deluded mind. The key is how to remove that barrier between the self and non-self. At the beginning we say that the self is not non-self, I am not you. But when you look deeply you see that I am made by other elements other than me. I am made by you, and in me I can see you. When we look deeply in the flower we can see the clouds, the sunlight, and other non-flower elements. We need to remove that barrier. And when we have removed it, the self is the non-self. We see self is made by the non-self elements, that the self is non-self.

We have a principle of identity. According to this principle: A=A

A is A, A cannot be B: A≠B

A cannot be B, C, D:  $A \neq B, C, D$

But in the wisdom of the Diamond Sutra A can be B:  $A=B$

Because the self is made by non-self elements.

And the mathematical formula is:  $A \neq A=A$

Meaning A is made of what is not A, therefore A is truly A.

In the Diamond Sutra there are many sentences which are written according to this formula ( $A \neq A=A$ ).

It means that the self is the non-self:  $\text{self} = \text{non-self} = \text{self}$

When we understand that the self is made by the non-self elements then we see the reality, the true nature of the self. In exactly the same way, if A is the bodhisattva who brings all the beings to the other shore, and if the bodhisattva still thinks that he is a bodhisattva, then he is not an authentic bodhisattva. But if we look at A and we can see non-A elements in it then it is truly A, then the bodhisattva is truly an authentic bodhisattva. If the flower is A, and we think that the flower is separate from the other things (a flower is not a cloud, is not sun, is not fertiliser), if we see the flower that way then it is not yet a true flower. But if looking deeply in the flower you can see that the flower is made by non-flower elements, we can see the elements B,C,D, then A is true A, the flower is a true flower.

Usually we use the example of the garbage and flower. Looking deeply in the flower we see garbage. Most of us think that a flower is a flower, garbage is garbage. But when we look deeply in the flower we see that garbage is a very important element in the flower, and then the flower is also the garbage. A is also B,C,D. When we can see that then we can see the true nature of everything. So that is the formula according to the sutra:

A is not the A that we have thought it is:  $A \neq A$

but A is also non-A:  $A=B, C, D$

Therefore A is true A:  $A=A$

A is not the A that we have thought it is, but it is also non-A. Therefore it is true A. Or another way to say it is when we look deeply in A and we can see that our notion about A is a wrong notion, a wrong perception, then at that time we start to understand the true nature of A. (If you understand so far put your hand up!)

This formula is similar to the second formula,  $A=B, C, D$ . I am the other. Usually we think that A is not B,C,D. But when we can see that A is made by B,C,D, that A is also B,C,D, then we can understand the true nature of A, the suchness of A. Therefore in order to realise the meaning of the Diamond Sutra we need to destroy the wrong notion about self. Then we can realise the wisdom of non-discrimination, the wisdom of non-self. Non-self is the key.

'Self' is a notion, a perception, an idea. But if we get rid of that notion only to be caught by another notion, the notion of 'non-self', then we are in exactly the same dilemma. Therefore according to the Diamond Sutra we have to overcome all the notions. The teaching of non-self is offered to help us overcome the notion of self, but when we can get rid of the notion of self then we also have to get rid of the notion of non-self. Non-self is not a concept, it's a method, a means, a practise - the teaching of non-self is to help us to liberate ourselves from the notion of self. The self is made by the non-self. When we look deeply in the self, if we can see the non-self elements, then we can get in touch with the suchness of the self. And at that time we can use the word 'self', but without being caught by the notion of self.

Self is the first notion mentioned in the Diamond Sutra, and we need to practise in order to liberate ourselves from this notion. How do we practise? When we eat, walk, sit, when we look at other people, at the clouds, the grass, then we can see ourselves; we can see that we are in those elements and we are not separate. And that is the meditation on non-self. Every time we cook, we cut carrots, we wash dishes, in those moments, that is the time for us to meditate. We need to understand the relationship between these things, and ourselves and we need to see ourselves in those things and to see those things in ourselves. If we have anger or jealousy then we should look deeply in order to understand that the anger or jealousy originated from our notion of self. And if we can liberate ourselves from that notion then we free ourselves from anger, from jealousy. So this is the practice. It is not a theory. And this practice, the practice of meditation on non-self, needs to be practised every day, every moment of our daily life.

The second notion is person, man, human being. We have a notion, an idea about man, about person. Usually we forget that the human being is a creature that evolved from animals, plants and minerals. Scientists have proved clearly that person is made by non-person elements. The human being is the most recent creature in the evolution of life on earth. When we think that we have the right to do anything, and that others, plants, animals, minerals are the means for us to get what we want, then we have a very wrong notion about man. We haven't understood that man is made of non-man elements, that A is made of non-A, and therefore A is true A. We need to remove the barrier between human beings and the non-human elements. The non-man elements are the plants, animals and minerals.

I want to emphasise something. We have all learned that man is one of the animals, and is the latest creature in the evolution of nature on earth, and we know that we cannot survive without plants, without animals. We know this, but we don't remember all the time. And we continue to discriminate and to destroy the plants, the animals, and the minerals, (elements of our environment). Therefore in our daily life we need to practise in order to understand the relation between human and non-human. If we can protect the non-human elements then we protect ourselves. The notion that man is the highest creature and that all the other elements are there to serve man is a very wrong idea. We have to understand that human is made by the non-human and we have a responsibility to protect the non-human elements. This is the wisdom we can attain when we meditate on non-self. With this wisdom we can save our environment and ourselves. 2600 years ago the Buddha realised this and taught us about it. So we can say that the Diamond Sutra is the oldest teaching about protecting the environment.

The third notion is living being. This is another notion we need to transform and liberate ourselves from. We think that living beings have a life span, and have feelings, perceptions and so on and are different from non-living beings. The Buddha has taught us that living beings are made by non-living beings, for example by plants and minerals. Therefore, in our daily life, we need to live in such a way that nourishes that wisdom, to nourish our understanding about the relationship between living beings and non-living beings, that living beings are made by non-living beings. Living beings are not living beings, therefore the living being is a true living being. Self is non-self, so that self is a true self. Man is not man, then man is truly man. If we can understand that man is made by non-man elements then at that time we understand man as true man. In the same way, if we look at living beings and we see and understand that living beings are made by non-living beings, then we understand the suchness, the reality of living beings. Here we repeat the wisdom of the Diamond Sutra, it means when we look at a cup of tea, if we can see that the cup of tea is made by non-tea elements then we can see the suchness of that cup of tea.

The fourth notion is life span. We have a perception that our life span is 70, 80 or 100 years. We think we exist from the time we were born to the time we die, and that this is our life span. That is another notion, a perception, a concept that we need to overcome and liberate ourselves from. According to that notion, before we are born we do not exist and after we die we are nothing. This is a very wrong notion. It is said in many sutras that when conditions are sufficient our body is formed, and when conditions

are not sufficient then our body does not manifest. We are caught by the idea of birth and death, the idea of existence and non-existence, and the idea of life span. The notion of life span is the basis of the notions of birth and death, coming and going, existence and non-existence, permanence and annihilation. All of these pairs of concepts have their foundation in the concept of life span. Therefore when we can destroy the notion of life span we can destroy the other notions.

The notions of permanence and annihilation are a contradictory pair of opposite notions. What is the belief of permanence? It is seeing that everything has an existence that never ceases. What is the opposite notion of annihilation? It is seeing that nothing exists. This is one pair of contradictory opposites. When we look deeply in all dharmas we see that everything changes, that everything has the nature of impermanence. But impermanence doesn't mean annihilation, so we have to liberate ourselves from both notions of impermanence and annihilation, they are both erroneous. They both bring about suffering, fear, and anxiety. For example when we love someone, we think that that person will live with us for our whole life. We do not see his or her impermanent nature and when that person passes away we suffer, because we are caught by the notion of permanence. It is the same for ourselves. Now we are living, we exist, but one day we cannot exist anymore, we will die. We have a great fear of being cut off from life, a fear of nothingness. This is why the philosopher Descartes said: "I think therefore I am." We say it loud to overcome our fear. If we are caught in the notion of permanence or in its opposite, annihilation, then we suffer in both cases.

The same thing is true for the notions of existence and non-existence. Descartes said: "I think therefore I am." He was caught in a notion of existence, clinging to it to overcome the fear of non-existence. Because he did not look deeply enough, he was fearful of being nothing especially when he was confronted with the death of someone, or with his own death. If we are caught in the notion of being we will also be caught in the notion of non-being. From the perspective of life span, we think we start to exist at the point of time we call birth; and we think we continue to exist until the point of time we call death, after which we think we cease to exist. Thus the notions of birth and death form the basis of the notions of being and non-being. Both of these notions have their roots in the fundamental notion of life span. The Buddha has taught that when conditions are sufficient things manifest, but to label that manifestation as being is wrong. Also when conditions are not sufficient, things do not manifest, but to label that as non-being is also wrong. Reality is beyond being and non-being, we need to overcome those notions. Hamlet said: "To be or not to be, that is the question." We can see that he was caught by these notions. But according to this teaching, "to be or not to be", is not the question. Because reality is beyond the notion of being or non-being, birth or death, coming or going. Where do we come from and where do we go to? Those are philosophical questions. But if we understand suchness then we know that we don't come from anywhere and we don't go anywhere.

The Tathagata doesn't come from anywhere and he doesn't go anywhere. That is the definition of Tathagata. Therefore the Tathagata is called the Tathagata. So all the notions, the notions of coming, going; being, non-being; birth, death; permanence, annihilation, all have their origin in the fundamental notion of life span. Therefore in the Lotus Sutra we learn that the life span of the Buddha is infinite. Our life span is the same, and we are the future Buddha, and we have an infinite life span. We do not begin to exist at the point of birth and we do not cease to exist at the point of death. We overcome and go beyond the notion of life span as the time between when we are born and when we die. When we can see  $x$  as  $x$ , reality as reality, then we can overcome all the notions. When we do walking meditation in autumn we see dead leaves, and we have a feeling of sadness. We call them dead leaves instead of yellow or red leaves. But if we look deeply at those leaves we see that each is a manifestation that pretends to die, but actually the leaf is not dead. We are caught in the notion of being born and being dead; birth and death; being and non-being; where does it come from, where does it go to; permanence, annihilation. The true nature of a leaf also goes beyond all these eight notions. We are like the leaf. The leaf becomes the soil in order to later become another leaf or a flower. So if we can understand the leaf and go beyond these eight notions, then we can understand and can see the suchness of a leaf. To practice means to meditate so that we can see the suchness of a leaf, we can see the suchness of ourselves. We have to look deeply at being young and being old; at being born, dying; coming, going; being, non-being; and then all of our suffering, our afflictions will be transformed. Master Tang Hoi, a Vietnamese Zen patriarch who was born and lived in the third century, has taught us a way of meditating called, "Letting go of the notions of body and of life span", (Phong Khi Xu Mang). So when we say: "I have only one life to live", it's not correct because life is unlimited. I am my children, my children are me.

When the Venerable Subhuti heard these words he did not understand. Therefore he didn't cry yet. The Buddha had to explain a little bit more, then he understood. "Moreover, Subhuti, if a bodhisattva practises generosity, she does not rely on any object, that is to say does not rely on form, sound, smell, taste, touch or objects of mind to practise generosity. That, Subhuti, is the spirit in which a bodhisattva should practise generosity, not relying on signs. Why? If a bodhisattva practises generosity and does not rely on signs then the happiness that results from this virtue cannot be conceived of or measured." From talking about the four notions he moves on to talk about the practice of generosity. Why? Because the Buddha was talking about prajnaparamita as one of the six ways to cross over to the other shore, and another of these six ways is to practise generosity. The other practices are mindfulness trainings, diligence, inclusiveness, concentration and the last one is insight, prajnaparamita wisdom.

In the Diamond Sutra the Buddha talks about the practice of generosity because it is the first practice, so he uses it as an example for the other five practices. He mentions forbearance but he doesn't talk about the other practices. But the nature of all six practices is prajnaparamita wisdom. If you practise generosity without understanding, without prajnaparamita wisdom, then it is not the highest practice of generosity. If you practise generosity and are not caught by the four notions then it is the highest practice of generosity. It's the same with the other five practices. When we practise the six paramitas (generosity, mindfulness trainings, diligence, inclusiveness, meditation, insight) we need to maintain our understanding, our wisdom of non-discrimination. When we look at form we understand that form is made of non-form. When we look deeply at sound we have to understand deeply that sound is made by non-sound elements. The same for smell, taste, touch, and objects of mind. Therefore we are not caught by form, sound, smell, taste, touch or objects of mind. If we are not caught by these and we are using the wisdom of non-discrimination, then our acts of generosity have reached the highest peak of practice.

Many of us want to be social workers to help other people, to practise generosity, but we are caught by the four notions, therefore the happiness that results is not very great. We are still angry, sad, and we still suffer because we are still caught by the four notions of self, person, living being and life span. If we practise generosity according to the spirit of the Diamond Sutra, using the wisdom of non-discrimination as fuel for our practice, then the happiness that results from this virtue is the greatest.

This is a difficult concept, therefore we should discuss it in Dharma discussion. We need to understand these teachings are not theories. These teachings are our daily practice. How in our daily life can we apply the wisdom of non-discrimination? How can we not be caught by the four notions? Otherwise if we learn about the sutra but we cannot apply it in our daily life, then our learning will not help us.

(END)

## The Diamond Sutra

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Dharma Talk of December 7, 1997

(Translated from Vietnamese into English by Sister True Emptiness)

Dear Sangha, Today is the 7 December 1977 we are in the Upper Hamlet in the Winter Retreat. Today before I continue in Vietnamese, I will summarise in English what we have learned in the last few talks.

The Diamond Sutra is made with a conversation between the Buddha and one of his disciples, Subhuti. Subhuti is known as someone who practises very well looking deeply into the nature of emptiness of everything that is. And, in the beginning, Subhuti asks the Buddha a question. His question is very practical. He wants to know how to master our mind, how to control our mind, how to take care of our mind in order for us to be able to pursue the path of practice. His question has three elements. The first element is he noticed that the Buddha is always willing to support the bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas are those who have a great aspiration to help others. That is why Subhuti recognised the fact that the Buddha always supports and gives energy to bodhisattvas who have a great deal of energy within them, because their desire, their deepest desire, is to serve and to help all living beings. And this is not discrimination on the part of the Buddha, but it is the willingness to invest in those who want to live for the sake of others.

The second element is that those bodhisattvas motivated by that desire to help other people, how can they cultivate their minds? How can they take care of their minds? What can they rely on in order to master their own minds? And this is a very practical question, because sometimes we don't know how to care for our minds, and we let our minds wander in the direction of suffering and delusion and uncertainty. That is why we can say that this question of Subhuti is very practical. I think there are only two elements in the question.

And the answer given by the Buddha to Subhuti is also very precise, and it has three elements. He said that bodhisattvas are those who should make a vow to bring all living beings from the shore of suffering to the shore of well being and liberation. But while doing the work of bringing living beings to the other shore, the bodhisattvas should not be caught in the idea of self. The bodhisattva should not see the distinction between the saviour and the living beings that are saved. And the question he asks is a kind of answer in that way, he said that if a bodhisattva still has the notion of self, of human being, of living being, and of life span, this is not exactly a bodhisattva yet. That is his answer.

And I have spent a lot of time explaining about these four concepts, these four ideas. The first idea is the idea of self. The second idea is the idea of man. The third idea is the idea of living beings, and the fourth idea is the idea of life span. And this is the summary of what I said in Vietnamese.

Self is the notion that there is a separate self that can exist independently from non-self elements. So the Buddha advises us to look into the self in order to see that the self is only made of non-self elements. And when you know, when you have seen that the self is made of non-self elements, you begin to see the real self. Otherwise you only have an idea, a wrong idea, about self, and that is why I talk about the principle of identity which is A is A, A is not B. That is the principle of identity that we are used to following in our thinking. And that thinking does not lead us very far, and that is why the Buddha gives us a method of looking, of thinking, that can help us to see more deeply into the nature of things. So suppose A is self, and if you look into the self you see that the self is made only of non-self elements. So instead of saying A is A, he said A is B, C, D, E, etc., because the self is made of only non-self elements. And when you are able to see that A is B, C, D, E, etc., it means not A, and then you can begin to see the real A. So the dialectics of the Diamond Sutra is A is not A, that is why it is a truly? This is the dialectics of the Diamond Sutra.

When you look into A, you have to see that A is entirely made of non-A elements, and if you are able to see that, now you can see the true nature of A. This is quite different from the way we are used to thinking and to behave. The same thing is true with the other four ideas. The idea of humans. Humans are a race, are a species among millions of species on earth, and if we look into the human, a man or a woman, we see that a man is made of non-man elements. If there are no animals, no vegetables, no minerals, man cannot be made at all. So man is made of non-man elements. This is an ecological insight. We can say that in order to protect man, we have to protect non-man elements. This is why can say that the Diamond Sutra is a most ancient text teaching us how to preserve our ecosystem in order for us to be able to preserve ourselves.

So humans are made of only non-human elements, and when you have seen that you begin to see the true nature of the human. Human are not human. Humans are made of non-human elements. That is why humans are really humans. The same thing is true with living beings. Living beings are believed to have sensations, perceptions, and so on, suffering and happiness; but if we look into the nature of living beings, we will see the same. We see that living beings are made of non-living -being elements like the minerals, the vegetables; and if you can see that, you begin to understand what is really a living being. In fact, science shows us that the frontier separating living beings and non-living beings is very vague. We cannot draw a sharp line between the two. There are beings that we cannot say are a vegetable or an animal. So a living being, if you can see it, is made of non-living being elements. Then you begin to see the true nature of living-beings.

The last idea is about life span. Usually we think that we are born at a certain time, we will exist for some time, and we will die. Birth and death. And this is a notion that does not correspond to the truth. In fact, the Buddha said that when conditions are sufficient, the body manifests itself, and you can see that as being; and when one of the conditions is lacking and you can no longer see the body and you say that there is no living-being. In fact, it is not true that you only begin to exist from here and you will stop existing at this point. In fact, the notion of life span is the ground for many other notions, like the notion of birth and death, the notion of being and non-being, the notion of coming and going, the notion of same or different, and so on. So the notion of life span has to be removed in order for us to see that reality is free from all notions, including the notion of birth and death, being and non-being, coming and going, and so on. So if you look deeply into the life span, you discover that this is only a manifestation, and if you get caught in your perception, the form, then you miss the whole thing. You cannot see reality as it is: reality which is free from birth and death, being and non-being, coming and going, same and different, and so on. So when you look at life span, and you see that your life span is not limited in the spirit of time, you begin to understand what is a life span.

So this formula is very good, very necessary, for you to understand the Diamond Sutra, because this formula was repeated several times in the Diamond Sutra. For example, a stupid person is not a stupid person that is why the Tathagata calls him a stupid person. A bodhisattva knows that he is not a bodhisattva, that is why he is called a bodhisattva. So that kind of language is very strange, but if you know the formula, you understand the Diamond Sutra quite easily.

Dear Subhuti, the bodhisattva tries to help, but does not lean on the form, on the sound, on the taste in order to help. It means that the bodhisattva tries to help without relying on form, sound, smell, taste, touch, or object of mind to practise generosity. The Diamond Sutra is the sutra that teaches us the six paramitas in a very concrete and deep way. You know that among the six paramitas the paramita on great understanding is the best. And we learn that the Buddha used to illustrate the great understanding paramita as being like a pot which contained water. It must be a deep, well-baked container, because if the

container is not well baked, it will have a lot of leaks and all our water will be gone. So if we don't have great understanding, all the other actions will be of no value or will not bring any success, because if the great understanding is not enough, if in our understanding there are many leaks - that means many short comings, many confusions - the other paramitas cannot be followed.

So the great understanding in the Diamond Sutra is that there is no distinction between us and other living beings. We feel that we are one body with everyone we help, but we don't have the impression of helping, like the right hand helping the left hand or like the hand helping the legs will not say, "I am helping you". So the great understanding is that we are one, that the other species are integral with ourselves. We are not different from other species who are part of our body. When we understand deeply like that, there is no distinction, and the help will be perfect, and the practise of generosity will not say it is the practise of generosity. It is like we are breathing, we are eating; we share, we practise generosity without knowing that we are practising generosity. We will not rely on form, sound, smell, taste, touch, object of mind; these things are the world. Because with our eyes we can see the form, with our ears we can hear sound, with our noses we can smell. Taste, touch and objects of our minds are only things we perceive, so all these six realms make the world.

Our concept, perception about things in our mind is an image, an idea we have about these things. The word dharma here means objects of mind, everything you perceive in your mind. Sometimes we perceive reality wrongly. But a wrong perception is still a dharma. So the table is a dharma, the flower is a dharma, the friend next to you is a dharma, and the sun is a dharma. But all of them are objects of your perception. It doesn't mean that you can catch their true reality. You have a perception about these things. So when you practice generosity, don't be caught by your perceptions and concepts; don't be caught by form, sound, form, smell, taste, touch, and object of mind. Just behave naturally, beautifully, like you brush your teeth, like you eat your breakfast, like you drink a cup of tea.

When we share something we don't think we own something that I am giving to you and you must thank me. Again, it's like the right hand helping the left hand. The right hand will not say: "I am helping you my left hand, you have to be thankful to me." The great understanding in the Diamond Sutra is to see we are one with everything. Don't think the other is the receiver. Don't think: "I am practising generosity. I am a great person. I am a generous person. I am giving to you. The right hand never says that to the left hand. The right hand can help your hurt feet but will not tell the feet: "I am helping you." And when the right hand helps the body to do something it will not discriminate and say to the left hand: "I am very talented because I can write poetry and calligraphy, I can cook and paint, and you, you have no value." The right hand knows that there is the presence of the left hand. The right hand knows form, sound, taste, etc. but the right hand is not ignorant and does not discriminate and say: "I am very important." The teaching of the Diamond Sutra is you must learn to see that you are that great body of life. If the other person is you then the person that hurt you is also you, the person who helps you is also you. When you help others you do everything like you do for yourself, like you breathe, like you eat.

There are those who are delinquent, caught by drugs, in prison. We can see these people in the light of the teachings of the Diamond Sutra. You see that they are you. Have you done something to help your left hand? Have you done something to help your toes? Because they are you. If you say: "Oh, we have to have the death penalty, we have to kill them all, they don't try to study or to live spiritually, they must behave like me." When you speak in that way, then according to the Diamond Sutra you are behaving as if you were the right hand saying to the left hand: "You have no value, you must write calligraphy like me, write poetry like me, you have to cook like me, you have to paint like me." That is our behaviour if we say we have to have the death penalty

The teaching of the Diamond Sutra is so deep. It can help you to see that such people are made of non-delinquent elements. Perhaps they don't have a father, or he is an alcoholic who ignores them. They have a mother who doesn't know how to take care of them. They live in an environment where everybody hates everyone else, where everyone is self-centred, competitive, violent, and unkind. If we were born in such a situation, and our father ignores us, our mother doesn't give us anything to eat, then we would be exactly like them. So, when we see clearly like that we will see we are them and they are us. In that case the right hand can do something to help the toes, the fingers, the ears, every part of the body, the hands have to do their best. So you can see that everybody is yourself. And when you look deeply like that you see your responsibility for those who suffer. And you have to take care of all of them. We never pay any attention to them, we never spare one cent for them or one minute for them. We are somehow co-responsible for the birth of the many delinquent people, of the many who use drugs, and we don't do anything to help them. We are responsible, don't blame them. When you look at A, you see that A is not A. A is made from elements other than A, the non-A elements. So you can see that delinquent person is not a delinquent person, but is all the elements which create that person. And then your heart is full of love, and you know what to do in order to create more conditions of love, understanding and care for those who are in need.

Another example is the way we see ourselves. When we look at ourselves, our own body and mind, there are many things we don't like, many behaviours we are not satisfied with. In each of us there is a judge and there is the person who is being judged. There are many of us who disagree with ourselves, who cannot accept ourselves, who feel we are so bad, we have so many shortcomings. We are so judgmental toward ourselves. We have so many weaknesses, and we don't want them. We want to transcend them, we want to transform them, but we can't. And so we start to despise ourselves. If you can't accept yourself, how can you accept others? So you have to learn to accept yourself first. The Buddha said that you will learn to look at yourself deeply. You are made of many elements that are not you. So, you look deeply into yourself to see the many elements that brought you into being. There are many genetic elements you have received from your parents, grandparents. There is your society, your traditions, the nation around you, the people around you, the economic situation, educational conditions and so on. So when you see all these things you see many elements which are not A in A, that is many elements which are not you in you. And so you feel less judgmental. You will not say: "Oh, I am so bad because..." We have inherited a lot. For example we might see: "My grandfather was also very weak in that way, he could not control himself", or "My mother was like that too" and so on. So you see many elements which are not you but which are in you. You say: "My father is exactly like that. My mother, my grandmother was like that. A lot of people around me influenced me, like my close friends." So you accept yourself as you are, and if you have a wish to transform yourself you have to cut all these roots. You have to say "Hello" to these elements and say: "Daddy, I don't want to continue like you." We end the circle of suffering now. But you smile to your shortcomings, you smile to that habit energy. You smile to the non-A elements. In the past you always blamed A. A is yourself, a separate self, full of shortcomings, full of everything for which you judge yourself. You can see all these elements you received from this friend so you can decide to keep away from that friend. I received these elements from my Mum. So I say hello to my Mum, but I say: "I don't want to be like you Mum. I received elements from my grandmother, I say: "Hello grandma, I don't want to continue these elements in you." So you smile, and you gently transform.

The first thing to do is to look deeply at A, A is yourself. And you see what power A has in A, that is how much power or control you can have over yourself. Instead of looking at A like the person that you hate, learn to look at A like the person that you love. For example, maybe you love me. But I am not me. I have all the good conditions which create me: the patriarchs, the Buddha; I am not so important as you thought. I received a lot from a lot of great people. And so these great people are transferring their wisdom to you. So that is A. A could be me, A could be the person you love, the person you hate, could be yourself. You look at A but you try to see the non-A elements in A so that you learn to appreciate all, and see in a broader way and not focus only on A.

Another example is when we join your palms and pay respect to a spiritual teacher in order to express our admiration and gratitude. We came to that teacher. He has a form. If he is someone who has deep understanding he can help us to go in a good direction, a better direction. And you bow deeply to him, you bow deeply to his form. You put all your trust and confidence in him. We invest 100% in the teacher. Three or four years later you discover that he was not like you thought. You had a wrong image of him. His reality is quite different. You have invested in a form, an image which is not the reality of that person. And then you leave him, and you suffer. How can we behave so that such things do not happen either to a teacher, or to a person you fall in love with? Also in that situation you invest three or four years in her or in him. Then after that time you discover that her or his

reality is so different, and you are shocked. And then you leave him or her and you are so desperate.

My advice is that of the Diamond Sutra. You look at that form, and you know that you have a perception about that form. In your head is just an image of that person but not the reality. And that image is made of that form. But that spiritual teacher is made of so many elements which are not him. You did not see clearly. When you first came to him you saw a number of qualities and you said: "You have these qualities, I am so happy." And you hoped that you could develop these qualities in yourself. Then later you see a number of shortcomings in him and you come and tell him. But maybe it's not a shortcoming, maybe your look is not deep enough and you have misunderstood. So with a big smile, with the great love that you have, you come to that person and tell him or her: "That is the shortcoming that I don't like in you very much. Maybe there is some reason behind it." When they can tell you yes, there is something behind, then you are able to see that it's not a shortcoming but maybe something more profound, something you may appreciate. Or if it's a real shortcoming you can discuss it in peace, in joy, in gentleness, and he can transform his shortcoming.

It's the same for us. We come to see a teacher but we do it in a very superficial way. We want him to appreciate us, to consider us as a great person. But if he is very busy and has many students and does not pay enough attention to you, then you feel hurt. You feel that because you appreciate him he must appreciate you. And you feel hurt, because it seems to you that other students are less good than you are and they are paid a lot of attention by the teacher. And you try your best but he doesn't pay attention to you, he doesn't even look at you. And then you suffer. That is because you rely on the form.

Sometimes I sit and give a lecture for many thousand people. More than one thousand people might kneel down in order to take the five wonderful mindfulness trainings. In the United States on the last trip more than 600 persons on one occasion knelt down in front of me and received the five wonderful trainings. And they pay deep respect like they pay respect to the Buddha. But I look deeply into this and I see that although these people pay respect to me, to this form, it's not really my form. This form is made from the wisdom, insights, and beautiful qualities of the Buddha, of the patriarchs, of my teacher. My teacher, the Buddha and the other bodhisattvas are borrowing my form for those people to pay respect. So they pay respect to the qualities of all these people. It does not affect me. I don't feel that I am very important. I don't feel that I am so great. I just let all these patriarchs borrow my form. Even if 600 persons or 600,000 persons pay respect to me it will not affect me. Because I know I am not me. I am very aware that A is not A, that is why A is real A. I am not me. I am somehow representing many spiritual traditions and many teachers who helped me and who borrow my form. They are paying respect to all these streams of wisdom that I received and that I just reflect and transmit to them.

When a young monk has just received his robe and has practised just a few months, lay people may come and pay respect to her or him. And they panic and say: "I have practised only a few months, I have no value, please don't pay respect to me." Don't say this. You have to be aware that they pay respect to the form of the Buddha in you, the form of many patriarchs in you, and they just borrow that form to pay respect. When people pay respect like that they can be in touch with a lot of sources of wisdom. But you have nothing to do with that. You are just letting your teacher borrow your form. And you feel that you are paying respect to these teachers at the same time. When they bow to the form, the robe of your teacher, you are paying respect to the teacher in that robe too. And you are living according to the teaching of the Diamond Sutra. When you pay respect to a person you have learned to see in this way. You have to see that you are paying respect to all these streams of wisdom, and you just borrow that form. And you know that although your teacher has many shortcomings he is still wearing the robe of many streams of teachers, of patriarchs, of those who are full of wisdom. And so you feel that you are not in touch with him, but you are in touch with many streams of insight by means of him, and we have a lot of respect.

I know of a Vietnamese lady who every time she sees a monk or nun she touches the earth three times, prostrates three times, with no discrimination. One day a lay person said to her: "You just paid respect to a monk, do you know who he is?" She answered, "Yes." "Do you know that he violates a lot of precepts, eats meat, secretly drinks alcohol, do you know that?" She said: "I know. But that is not my business. He still wears the monk's robe. I try to touch the deep insight of many streams of ancestors behind him. I pay respect to this. I am not affected by his behaviour." She is practising with the wisdom of the Diamond Sutra, she is not relying on form.

Even if you are a monk or nun who has received full ordination, if your behaviour is based in your being caught by form then you cannot advance. Sometimes you are a high monk, but you still behave like someone caught by form. If you are already a monk or a practitioner in the practice centre for a rather long time, and if everyday your wisdom is deeper, if everyday you are more peaceful in yourself and with the people around you and you can accept the most difficult people who may be around you, then you know what you want and you don't need to invest in one person, one teacher. So you have to look deeply: are you growing every day? Are you happier every day? Are you more in harmony with yourself and with the others around you every day, the unlovable people as well as the loveable people? So it doesn't effect you if your teacher does or doesn't keep the precepts, it doesn't effect you what other people say or do. You only take care of yourself. You try your best to really help people. Sometimes when you see someone's shortcomings you are not skilful enough and you shock people by scolding and behaving in a way that creates wars around you. You look deeply and you see the shortcomings of everyone, and you try your best in a skilful and loving way to transform these shortcomings, in the way that you would do it for yourself.

When your left hand is caught and wounded you do not say "Stupid hand, you have to change." You show care so that your left hand can be healed. So you try to help other people in the sangha who are not very well, who are easily hurt and have a lot of difficulties. You will not come to these members of the sangha and say: "You do not behave very well, you have to change." So we learn to care for the people who are weak in the sangha, like you are caring for your left hand, for the wound on your leg. You care without any idea of caring, you do it in a natural way, like you care for yourself.

Wherever there is form there is some deception, some deceptive way of seeing. And you can be caught by form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and object of mind. All the images we have in our mind can be very deceptive. We have to be very humble about them. Learn to look more deeply to see all the sides of reality and to understand better. If you see that the other side of the reality of that person is not so beautiful as you wish, then with care and love you still can help that person to transform, you can help in such a way that everything will be peaceful and harmonious for yourself and the people around you.

When Bodhidharma met with King in China the king told Bodhidharma: "I have built many Buddhist temples, do you think I have a lot of merit? The King expects Bodhidharma to say: "Oh, you have a lot of merit." But Bodhidharma said: "No, no merit at all." This is a very good answer. It can shock the King. And if he is shocked then he has a chance to learn the wisdom of the Diamond Sutra. But if not then he will be very proud of himself and be caught by form.

Sometimes people are taking a nap or enjoying themselves while we are cleaning pots or working the garden. There are many ways to work for the Sangha. If you say, "Oh, this is a good occasion for me to serve the sangha, even though others are sleeping and enjoying themselves", then your merit will be great. If you say: "I am the only one who works hard while others are enjoying themselves or taking a long nap, there are so many lazy members of the Sangha who don't do anything", then your merit is very small, it's nothing, like Bodhidharma told the King.

"Subhuti, do you think that the space in the eastern quarter can be measured?" "No, World Honoured One." Subhuti, can space in the western, southern and northern quarters, above and below be measured?" "No, World Honoured One." "Subhuti, if a bodhisattva does not rely on any concept when practising generosity, then the happiness that results from that virtuous act is as great as space." It means when you practise generosity you do it without keeping track, you do it for your joy, you do it like you do it for yourself. Like when you are thirsty you drink, when you are hungry you eat. So the work you are doing you do in a very natural, loving way, like you care for your own body.

"What do you think Subhuti? Is it possible to grasp the Tathagata by means of bodily signs?" "No, World Honoured One, when



the Tathagata speaks of bodily signs there are no signs being talked about." You have to see the Tathagata without signs. If you try to find the Buddha with certain physical characteristics you are deceived. The Buddha can hide himself in other forms, so don't be tricked by the sign.

The Buddha said to Subhuti "In a place where there is something that can be distinguished by signs, in that place there is deception. If you can see the sign-less nature of signs then you can see the Tathagata."<sup>(5)</sup> Please learn this sentence by heart, it is the core of the teaching of the Diamond Sutra. Beauty can be seen in the autumn leaves, in the spring blossom, but also in the fallen leaf. If you can see the sign-less nature of signs then you can see the Tathagata. If you can see the non-A elements in A then you can see A deeply. Don't see A superficially. Learn to see many different elements which are not A in order to see A deeply. If you are still angry, sad, suffering, jealous that is because you are caught by form. The sign could be you. The sign could be the other person. You see that you are A in a very superficial way, you don't see the many elements behind you, which make you. You see the other person exactly the same way, as A, superficially, you don't see the many elements which are not A. You only see A. You think you understand yourself but you don't know who you are.

Western philosophy also says: "Know yourself." This means you don't know who you are, you have to look more deeply and see yourself more deeply. That truth is not only inside of the Buddha. There are many other people around the planet who have the same insights. We have learn to see the non-A elements in A. When you are able to see the non-A elements in the other person then your anger, sadness, suffering, jealousy will be gone. When you are angry with someone you have to see the many elements that are not him or her. When you see in this way, when you see many elements which are not him but are now in him, then you see him in a deeper way, a broader way and you can accept A more easily.

When you see yourself with all your difficulties and self judgement, if you can see the non-you elements coming from many people who are not you, such as your grandfather, your grandmother, your father, then you see that much of your severity and other attitudes come from other roots, other elements which are not you. And then you see: "Ah, that is my grandpa who is judging my friend." And then when you see in that friend all the many elements which are not him or not her, then you can see this is why they behave in such a way. The other person could be your son, daughter, father, mother, or your partner. You have to learn to see the other person like a mirror. If he behaves like this, it's because you behave like that. You have to see how much responsibility you have for the manifestation of that behaviour and how much responsibility the other person has. So, when you look into yourself and into the other person you see other elements in that person and in yourself, and then you start to find a way to undo the difficulties and to make peace.

The other day I met with a number of candidates who want to become monks and nuns. There is one who is only 14 years old and another who is 16. I said something like this: "If you don't have a very great desire to become a monk or nun you should not try to become a monk or nun. You must want to become a monk more than 100% in order to decide." Because becoming a monk or nun is very important. We make the vow to give rise to a lot of energy in order to transform our shortcomings and those of the people around us: father, sister, brother in our own family, as well as the people we live with. So, we don't become a monk in order to find an enjoyable situation in which to take refuge. Becoming a monk means to invest all your life in a career. This career is well traced by the Buddha 2,600 years ago. He not only tried to transform all his own shortcomings, but he vowed to transform all the short comings of his blood family, his spiritual family, and all the society around him, all of society that could be in touch with him. So, it's a big career.

When you decide to become a monk the simplicity of your living conditions will not effect you. Maybe the place where you live has no heating system, or there is not enough food to eat. You don't live in too ascetic a way, but you try to live in the most simple way, in order to be able to spend your time and invest your life in the ways of transforming yourself and transforming other people around you, and to invest in the enterprise of those who vow to serve the world. That great energy to transform yourself and to transform the world we call bodhicitta, the mind of love, the mind of awakening. If Plum Village feels too poor, the life too simple, not comfortable enough, if you are not very happy and you think you cannot live like that, then you know you are not prepared to become a monk or nun. Becoming a monk or nun is not like going to university, because after university you leave and make your own career. Your teachers and friends at the university are just temporary. But to become a monk you have to consider your teacher and the members of the Sangha as your companions not only for this life, but also for many more lives, and you will not quit the sangha. Because one drop of water will not arrive at the ocean. One drop of water will evaporate along the way. But if the drop of water joins the river then the whole river will go to the ocean. Alone, you cannot go anywhere. But if you join the Sangha of practice, the sangha of the career of Gautama Buddha then you can go anywhere, you can transform a mountain, an ocean, you can do many things.

When you go out from Plum Village sometimes people admire you, and you have the idea that you can leave and become a very important spiritual teacher for the people. But you may not remember that one drop of water cannot arrive at the ocean. Without the sangha we can be caught by the desire for fame. People praise us a lot and we forget that we are an A made up of a lot of non-A elements. You need to remember that you are made up of many non-A elements. You could be caught by laziness and forget to practice, you can get caught by your own negative habit energy. But living in the sangha people will reflect your negative energy back to you. They will say: "That is your negative habit energy, please transform it." And in this way you cannot keep it forever. They remind you once, twice, three times, and then you have to try to transform. But when you live alone nobody will remind you and your negative energy can grow stronger, and slowly we become a monster without knowing it. I wrote the short story The Pine Gate in order to say just this; that if you do not practice mindfulness one day a holy person can become a monster. The only way to help ourselves is to live with the sangha so the sangha will shine their awareness on our negative energy and help us transform it, and will help us to keep and strengthen our positive energy.

We have to take refuge in the 3-jewels. "I take refuge in the Sangha" because in the sangha can shine their awareness on my negative energy. Alone we can be so sure that we are correct. But in the sangha other people may tell us we're wrong. Even if you are a member of the sangha you might say: "I see that this is correct, so I'll just do it. I have looked deeply, what I am doing is correct. I am being true to myself, I don't care if members of the Sangha think I should not behave in such a way. Even if the sangha says that I should not do something, I do as I like." In that case you do not believe in the insight of the Sangha.

In the past the Buddha also took refuge in the sangha and the sangha eyes. The sangha eyes have decided many precepts for the sangha. So the Buddha Gautama also took refuge in the sangha, who are we to say: "I only do what I believe is correct?" In that case we do not really take the three jewels into our heart. In principle you have to request the sangha to help you to see your shortcomings. But if the Sangha tells us: "No, don't do it like that" and we say: "No, I don't care, what I see is very important and correct" then what is the use to be with the Sangha? Maybe you say: "This sangha is stupid, I'm leaving." So, you can leave. But when you leave you will see your shortcomings become stronger every day, and one day you become a monster without knowing it. And you may still be wearing the monk's robe. It's happened to many monks and nuns who live alone. They still wear the robe but they are not real monks. It is the wisdom of the Buddha, that in his time no monk stayed alone. Even in a new small practice centre we must have a Sangha. In the time of the Buddha it was always like that. There was never a monk who owned a big temple and lived alone.

The Buddha said that even if you come to place where all the physical conditions are good but the practice is not very good, you have to leave. In the place where there are a lot of good methods to transform your bad habit energy, but where there is not enough food for you to eat, not enough room for you, you have to stay in a tent in the cold winter, in that case even though there are good methods you have to leave because you cannot practice when you live in the cold of winter. But if you come to the place where there is enough housing and food, enough teaching and good methods, even if they chase you away you have to try your best to stick to them. That is what the Buddha taught to many monks in his time. When you have physical conditions that are good enough and you also have very good methods, you must have enough wisdom to go ahead in this practice environment in order to transform yourself. If you have appropriate conditions like that and if you don't go ahead it's a pity, a waste.

What does practice mean? Practice means trying to destroy the frontier between yourself and others; the person nearby, the person far away, and living beings around you. Among your habit energies may be the habit energy of not being able to communicate with people around you in the same sangha. You have to look deeply into yourself in order to see why. And when you see that frontier exists you have to dismantle it in order to be one with persons in the same sangha as you, and to get roots in everyone in the sangha, and to allow other people in the sangha to get roots in you. If you are such a person I am sure that you will be happy and when you are happy you will never want to leave the sangha. If you want to leave the sangha it means you have not rooted yourself in people and have not let people root themselves in you. You feel lonely, cut off, in a shell, you feel nobody understands you, and so you have to leave. If you are not successful in dismantling the frontier between you and others, if you are not happy with other members of the sangha, how can you go out and help others?

You can give a wonderful Dharma talk, repeating what I have said. But people very soon notice that you are just repeating words from other people. They will discover many of your shortcomings. If they see like that, they just buy the tape of Thay and they don't need to come to you. So we have to learn to destroy the frontier between ourselves and others and to feel one with the good as well as the less good and to help transform skilfully, lovingly. But if you are still in a shell and you feel that nobody in this sangha understands you, and you think you have learned enough already so now you can go out and set up a practice centre where you will be the boss, then you will see, people will discover very soon.

So we have to take refuge in the sangha. It's how you can see. Everyone in the sangha gives you a lot of happiness and you give everyone in the sangha a lot of happiness naturally, like you eat and drink, without effort. If there's no effort it's because you have succeeded in dismantling the frontier between you and them. If you're still jealous and still feel hurt by others then we still have the frontier. Having the frontier we feel hurt, not having the frontier we are not hurt.

Even if you can recite many sutras by heart, it won't help. People can buy many books, they can even buy the one hundred books of the Tripitaka to read, so they don't need you. They only need your transformation, they only need that source of joy and peace radiating from you. You live happily with yourself, happily with people around you. So the practice is to try to dismantle the frontier, dismantle our shell, in order to take root in other members of the sangha, and let other members of the sangha take root in us.

When you see a banana tree you see it has three or four big leaves, very fresh, very green extending to the sky. These banana leaves absorb the sunshine and carbon dioxide to make sap which nurtures the whole banana tree. One big fresh leaf nurtures many young leaves which are still rolled up like a cylinder inside the banana tree. The big leaves are nurturing the young leaves. So you who have practised four, five or six years in Plum Village you are like the big leaf who is nurturing the young leaves, your young brothers and sisters in the Sangha who are just newly ordained. So you are no longer one drop of water, you are already the stream of water, and all together you will go to the ocean. And you must be in harmony with everyone.

In the body there are billions of cells. If you look deeply into each cell in your body there is no cell who is the boss, including the neurones in your brain, no one is the boss. Every cell stays in their own position and fulfils their own duty, and thanks to every cell playing their own role, taking their own responsibility to be in harmony, the body is happy. But if there is one cell who decides not to be like the others, one cell who decides: "No, I will not divide exactly like this" or "I want to change my position", then the body gets a cancer, and people have to make surgery and take out this abnormal cell. So it's the same for the sangha. If someone causes a lot of trouble in the sangha we have to make a surgery and invite that person to leave. So everybody tries to be in their own position and do their best in order to live in harmony with themselves and with people around.

You live as a sangha in harmony. For the sangha to be harmony there are many guidelines: the five trainings, the ten trainings of a novice, the 248 trainings of a monk. All these trainings are for the harmony of the sangha. If you are not in harmony with the sangha you could be a dangerous cell for the body and you can create a cancer in the body; harmony is the principle. Every member of the sangha has to practice according to the five guidelines, the ten guidelines, or the 248 guidelines in order to live in harmony with others.

We know we are one drop of water in the big current of the river so we can all go to the ocean together. Becoming a monk or nun is forgetting that you have a separate self. Even if we are not a monk or nun yet, we decide to devote our life to the practice and train ourselves to transform to live without a shell, to be one with the sangha, to be one with everyone around us. That is the teaching of the Diamond Sutra.

## The Diamond Sutra

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Dear sangha, today is the 11 December 1997, we are in the New Hamlet in the Winter Retreat. We will continue to study the Diamond Sutra.

The Buddha asked Subhuti "What do you think Subhuti, can you recognise the Tathagata through form?" This is a test question, he asks it to make sure that Subhuti has understood the teaching. Subhuti said: "No, World Honoured One, it is impossible to perceive the Tathagata by means of form. Because what the Tathagata calls form is not in fact form, that is why it is called form" (section 5). A is not A, therefore it is truly A. Subhuti has learned the language, the dialectic of the Diamond Sutra. He has learned that the teaching of the Diamond Sutra is not the same as the principle of identity. The dialectic of the Diamond Sutra is: A is not A, therefore it is truly A.

When the Buddha heard Subhuti say that form is not form, therefore it is truly form, the Tathagata knows that Subhuti is about to understand his teaching, and he says: "In a place where there is something that can be distinguished by signs, in that place there is deception. If you can see the sign-less nature of signs, then you can see the Tathagata." (5) So when you can see the non-A elements in A then you can see the true A. When you see the non-form of everything then you can see the Tathagata. This phrase is very beautiful, very well known.

When the Venerable Subhuti saw the depth of the teaching, he saw that it is not difficult for him to understand the sutra because he is able to sit in front of the Buddha and be guided by him. So he wondered what will happen 500 years from now. How will people understand this teaching: "When you see the non-form of the Tathagata you can see the Tathagata?" So he asked the question: "World Honoured One, today it is not difficult for me to hear this wonderful sutra, have confidence in it, understand it, accept it, and put it into practice. But in the future, in 500 years, if there is someone who can hear this sutra, have confidence in it, understand it and put it into practice, then certainly the existence of someone like that will be great and rare." (14) He really cares for the future generations. Subhuti asked: "In times to come, will there be people who, when they hear these teachings, have real faith and confidence in them?" And the Buddha said: "Do not speak that way, Subhuti. Five hundred years after the Tathagata has passed away, there will still be people who enjoy the happiness that comes from observing the precepts. When such people hear these words, they will have faith and confidence that here is the truth." (6) So according to the teaching of the Tathagata, if we practise virtue and keep the precepts, then thanks to caring for those good seeds, we have enough conditions and the opportunity to understand the deep teachings of the Buddha. "We should know that such people have sown seeds not only during the lifetime of one Buddha, or even two, three, four or five Buddhas, but have in truth planted wholesome seeds during the lifetimes of tens of thousands Buddhas." (6)

When we listen to this we see that the Buddha's teaching is a very rich field of merit, that the Buddha is a good place where we can sow our seeds of virtue. When we have good seeds and we sow them in that field then very soon we will harvest a lot of fruit. We have the seeds, we have time, youth, ideals, love, willingness; all of these are good seeds. What do we take refuge in? Where do we sow those seeds? Many young people don't know the field where they sow their seeds, so they cannot harvest much. So, do the young people know the right place to sow their seeds? The Buddha is the best field in the world in which you can sow your seeds. And if you know how to sow those seeds, very soon you will harvest a lot of fruit from that field. Practising the precepts, practising virtue, that is sowing seed in the rich field of the Tathagata. And the people who have the opportunity to listen to the teaching of the Buddha are the people who have sown wholesome seeds in many Buddhas in the past. That is why they have the chance to get in touch with the rich teaching of the Buddha. Perhaps for many people who listen to this teaching it is just like a cow listening to music; they don't understand its meaning. Fifty years ago many scholars in the West who read the Diamond Sutra didn't understand it and said that the Buddha is speaking nonsense, the sutra doesn't have any meaning, and is very insignificant.

"Anyone who for only a second gives rise to a pure and clear confidence upon hearing these words of the Tathagata, the Tathagata sees and knows that person, and he or she will attain immeasurable happiness because of this understanding." (6) Listening to these teachings, which are difficult to understand and appreciate, if we can understand and believe even for one moment then we will be known and seen by the Tathagata. "Why? Because that kind of person is not caught up in the ideas of a self, a person, a living being and a life-span." (6) This is a very beautiful sentence. When we can understand for just one moment, then suddenly the Tathagata knows and sees us and we have a strong source born in us and we receive support and strength from the Buddha.

According to optical science when we have a reflective mirror and we can see the eye of someone in the mirror then we know that person can also see us. I see the eye that sees me. When we sit in a car and we look in the rear view mirror, if the person in the back seat can see the driver's eyes in the mirror it means that the driver can also see him. So when we see the Buddha it means the Buddha is seeing us also. The teaching in the sutra is very clear, that whoever can see the non-form of every form can see the Tathagata. If you are able to see the non-mark elements in the mark then you can see the Tathagata. And when you can see the Tathagata and the Tathagata can see you and recognise you, then suddenly the energy of the Tathagata will enter you, and within you there will be a strong source of energy, because you have the strong support of the Buddha, of the Tathagata. If you see the Tathagata don't say you don't understand the Tathagata. If you understand your friend then your friend suddenly will understand you. Whatever student can understand their teacher, can see the heart of their teacher, then the teacher can also understand him or her, and the energy of the teacher will be transmitted to the student very strongly. When you don't understand your teacher then your teacher cannot see you. You feel this energy that is transmitted to you, and it is the same in the Sutra.

"That kind of person is not caught up in the idea of a self, a person, a living being or a life span. They are not caught up in the idea of a dharma or the idea of a non-dharma. They are not caught up in the notion that this is a sign and that is not a sign." (6) The Buddha already spoke of the four marks of self, person, living being and life span. Now he introduces four more notions: dharma, non-dharma; sign, no sign. This is another branch coming out from the tree, an extension of this teaching. Dharma is phenomena, things, objects of our perception. Those things appear, they have their own mark, and the mark is the object of our perception. Form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and dharma; all of these are phenomena, the objects of our consciousness.

Our perception gives us the impression that there is a dharma. For example when we look at a rose we think that there is a rose, we have the notion of a rose. But when we overcome the notion of rose we may come to the notion of non-rose, from the notion of dharma we go to the notion of non-dharma. But non-rose, non-dharma is also just a concept or notion. The rose appears in our perception as a dharma, a thing. We have been taught that we have to be careful, because the sign, the mark, is dangerous, deceptive, we must not to grasp it but must transcend it. So then you say that the rose is just an image, an illusion, that actually there is no rose, no dharma. So from the extreme of "dharma" we have gone to another extreme, that of "non-dharma" We want to transcend one idea but then we get caught in another idea, another notion. We need to transcend both of the extremes, both are wrong perceptions. That is why we should not get caught in the notion of dharma or the notion of non-dharma, the notion that this is a sign or that is not a sign. When we are able to escape from the notion of sign then we can get caught into the notion of non-sign. But non-sign is also a notion, a concept, it's the same as the idea of existence and non-existence.

The sutra tells us, "If you are caught up in the idea of a dharma, you are also caught up in the ideas of a self, a person, a living

being, and a life span. If you are caught up in the idea that there is no dharma, you are still caught up in the ideas of a self, a person, a living being and a life-span."(6) Any idea, any notion has to be transcended, whether it is a notion of dharma or non-dharma, sign or no sign, being or non-being. "That is why we shouldn't get caught up in dharmas or in the idea that dharmas do not exist." We shouldn't get caught up in the notion of a dharma, but we shouldn't get caught up in the notion of non-dharma either. "This is the hidden meaning when the Tathagata says: 'Bhikkhus, you should know that all of the teachings I have given to you are a raft.' All teachings (Dharma) must be abandoned, not to mention non-teachings."(6) This last sentence is a very famous sentence of the Diamond Sutra. The Buddha uses a metaphor, comparing the teachings to a raft. The Sanskrit word "dharma" has at least two meanings. The first is the word dharma meaning things, the second is the word Dharma meaning the teachings. The Diamond Sutra talks about both of these meanings. The word dharma is like the rose we talked about a while ago. The word Dharma in the above sentence means the teachings, being compared to a raft. All of the monks and the nuns should learn the Chinese original and be able to write the characters of this sentence. In the past I learned the Diamond Sutra page by page from a book just like this one (in Chinese).

This sentence comparing the teachings to a raft is very famous. If we read the Sutra on the Better Way to Catch a Snake we see the same sentence; it has its root in that sutra. In that sutra the Buddha taught that you have to be very careful and skilful when you learn his teachings. If you are not intelligent then you will be caught by the teaching, and when you are caught by the teaching you will lose the meaning of the teaching. It is just like a person unskilled in catching a snake, he catches the snake by the tail, so the snake can turn around and bite him. But if he knows how to catch the snake, just behind the head, it will not bite him.

So it's the same with the teachings. If you are caught by the teachings you cannot be transformed, you cannot practice. You have to be very intelligent and very careful about receiving the teachings. So, the teachings that I give now, please do not be caught by them. "All teachings must be abandoned, not to mention non-teachings." It says in the Sutra on the Better Way to Catch a Snake that if we are caught by the non-teaching it is very dangerous. So the Diamond Sutra has taken the teaching from that sutra and tells us we should not be caught by the Dharma and we should not be caught by the non-Dharma either, in both the meanings of the word dharma: objects and teachings.

We say that the Dharma is very precious. But if we are caught by ideas then the Dharma becomes an obstacle to our practice. Just like someone who wants to cross the river. He needs to make a raft. But if he thinks the raft is so beautiful that he carries it on his head and does not want to cross the river, or if after he crosses the river he puts the raft on his head and walks away with it, that is ridiculous. The raft has served its purpose, it's no longer useful. The same with the teachings. The teachings are helping us. If we keep the teaching, if we boast about it, then it does not have any use. We should use the teaching like a raft to bring us across the river. And then when we've crossed the river we can leave the raft there for someone else to use.

If we look at ourselves we see we are more or less like that person. We learn a little bit of the teaching, we think we understand it, and we are proud that we are able to get in touch with the teaching. We think that the teaching is number one, the best. But if we don't want to use the teaching to cross the river, then we are that stupid person, nothing less. After I'd been studying the Diamond Sutra for twenty years I got in touch with the Sutra on the Better Way to Catch a Snake. Then I knew that the Diamond Sutra has its origin in the Sutra on the Better Way to Catch a Snake. The French publisher has just put the two sutras together to make the book Thundering Silence.

So we should not be caught by the raft, and we shouldn't pursue the non-Dharma either. If we get caught in the non-teachings then we are also caught, we are not liberated. Being caught in the idea of non-Dharma is even more dangerous than being caught in the idea of the Dharma. For example when we are caught in the idea of "being" the Buddha taught many ways for us to overcome and transcend the idea of "being". But when we get caught in the idea of "non-being" then that is even more dangerous. In the Ratnakuta Sutra the Buddha says that it's better to be caught in the idea of being than to be caught in the idea of non-being. When you are caught in the idea of being you can use the idea of non-being to cure that sickness, but once you are caught in the idea of non-being you cannot overcome it with the idea of being. So you have to overcome both the idea of being and the idea of non-being. You should not be caught in the idea of a sign, a mark. But you also should not be caught in the idea of signlessness. Even if the Buddha has taught that if you can see the signless nature of signs, then you can see the Tathagata. We have a tendency to grasp at the signless when we leave the sign. That is the teaching of the Tathagata, and we can see it more clearly later on in the sutra.

"What do you think, Subhuti, has the Tathagata arrived at the highest, most fulfilled awakened mind?"(7) So, the Buddha tests Subhuti once more to see if he understands the teaching deeply. The Buddha asked: "What do you think Subhuti? In ancient times when the Tathagata practised under Buddha Dipankara did he attain anything?" Subhuti answered: "No, World Honoured One, he did not attain anything."(7) The Buddha Dipankara was a teacher of the Tathagata. Dipa means the torch, it also means island. The Buddha asks Subhuti two consecutive questions in order to test his understanding, now he is not caught in the notion of attaining or not-attaining.

"What do you think, Subhuti? Does a bodhisattva create a serene and beautiful Buddha field?"(10) Everyone thinks that a bodhisattva is one who makes the land of the Buddha more beautiful every day so that other people can come and be happy. Very often we think that the responsibility of the bodhisattva is to adorn, to beautify the land of the Buddha. Just like our practice centre of Plum Village. This is just like a small Buddha land and in Plum Village, in the Upper Hamlet, the Lower Hamlet, the New Hamlet, everywhere there are bodhisattvas who would like to make the village more beautiful so that the retreatants can come and can be happier. These bodhisattvas might plant more trees or build more rest rooms, or decorate the rooms and make them more beautiful and comfortable for the guests. There is a bodhisattva who thinks that we need to be fresh and to smile so that the practice centre can be more beautiful. That is called adorning the Buddha land. If every day we are angry, we are sad, we put our garbage into our practice center and it will not be more beautiful, and the retreatants who come to us will not be happy. Day after day our practice centre loses its Buddha character and we are polluting the Buddha land. The bodhisattvas are the ones who practice beautifying the Buddha lands every day.

Subhuti replied: "No, World Honoured One. To create a serene and beautiful Buddha field is not in fact creating a serene and beautiful Buddha field. That is why it is called creating a serene and beautiful Buddha field." So Subhuti repeats the formula of the Diamond Sutra: A is not A, therefore it is true A. That means that a bodhisattva while he is adorning the Buddha land is not caught by the idea that he is the only person who is beautifying the land and that the other person is not. Such a person is not really a bodhisattva. Someone like that is basing his work on a perception of self, person, living being and life-span, therefore they are not a true bodhisattva and their merit is small. At the same time there are other people who work without being caught by the idea of self. They don't discriminate between themselves and others, they don't see that they are making the village more beautiful and that other people are wasting their time. So the bodhisattva is not caught in the idea of a self. They can see the non-A elements in A. When we beautify the Buddha land and we still see that we are beautifying the Buddha land then we are not beautifying the Buddha land. We should use Buddhist psychology to help us understand this.

In Buddhist psychology we are given the teaching of the three natures, the trisvabhava. When we look at something we first of all see the first nature that is called vikalpa, the nature of discrimination. For example we see a person and at our first look we see that that person is not us, we are different from that person. For example when we hear about a car accident which has just happened in Bordeaux in which three people died, our first reaction is how lucky we are that we are not those three people. That is the nature of discrimination. Or when we hear the news that a person has cancer and we feel lucky and happy that we are not that person. That is the nature of discrimination, because it is based on the discrimination between ourselves and the other person. When we look deeply into that person we will see that that person is related to us, lives near us. If around us many people have cancer, then we have also been exposed to the causes of cancer, because we are related to these people very closely and we have the same environment. When the right hand looks at things it very naturally overcomes the nature of discrimination. The right hand never says: "The left hand is wounded, I am not wounded." It never has the nature of discrimination.

in its perception. And it sees that when the left hand is wounded it is just as if the right hand is wounded.

Do you know how many US soldiers died in Vietnam during the time the US was involved in the Vietnam War? About 50,000 American soldiers died in Vietnam. And that war lasted for ten years. In car accidents every year in the US over 50,000 people die. That's every year, not every ten years. So in ten years 500,000 people in the US pass away in car accidents. Some people who drive are agitated, they drink, they're not careful in their driving. In Texas they investigated and found out that 43% of the car accidents are alcohol related. So, when we hear of a car accident we think that it is nothing related to us. But perhaps today or tomorrow we might have an accident. We think the other person who is in a car accident is not us, but when we look deeply, we see that it could be us very soon. So, it's not the problem of the other person alone, but it's truly our problem. At first we discriminate between the other person and ourselves. But when something happens to the other person it happens to us. It happened to them yesterday, but it can happen to us today. So when we look with the nature of discrimination we don't see the truth. When we see A with the nature of discrimination we will not see A truly. So we have to train ourselves to look into A with a view of non-A. We need to look, seeing the nature of interdependence, interbeing; "this is because that is", things arise because of each other. This is the nature of interdependent origination (paratantra).

Paratantra means every thing bases on other things to help it to manifest. Just like when we look into a rose. At first we think a rose is only a rose. But if we look deeply into a rose we see that a rose can only be made up of non-rose elements, like the earth, the water, the air, the sunshine, the fertiliser. We begin to see the non-rose elements and we see that the rose is made up of the non-rose elements. The rose has to base itself on the sunshine, the fertiliser, the hard work of the farmer, and many, many things, for it to manifest. So the manifestation of one is based on the presence of all others.

If you look carefully into me you will see my teacher, the Tu Hieu Temple, the Buddha. So, if when you see me, you can see the other elements that are not me, then you truly can see me. You have to train yourselves to look in this way, you look at other people with interbeing eyes, then you can see the true nature of everything. When you look into A you should see the non-A elements, when you practice deeply with the eyes of interdependent origination, you can discover the true nature of A. True nature is also called the nature in itself, the nature *per se*, the nature of perfection, the true reality, or suchness. In Sanskrit it's *nispanna*. When we look into A and we are caught in the four notions of self, human being, living being and life span, then we are deceived by our way of looking. So we have to train ourselves with interbeing eyes to see the non-A elements in A and then the truth begins to reveal itself to us. If our practice is deep we can see the true nature of A. There is false A and true A. So we arrive at the Diamond Sutra formula of A is non-A, therefore A is really A.

It's the same when practising the six paramitas. If you practise according to the four notions of self, human being, living being and life-span, then you are not truly a bodhisattva. You are seeking praise, recognition, fame, but this is not true liberation, this is not the true practice. "Moreover, Subhuti, when a bodhisattva practises generosity, he does not rely on any object, that is to say he does not rely on any form, sound, smell, taste, touch or dharma to practise generosity. That, Subhuti, is the spirit in which a bodhisattva should practise generosity, not basing on signs. Subhuti, if a bodhisattva does not rely on any concept when practising generosity, then the happiness that results from that virtuous act is as great as space, it cannot be measured. Subhuti, the bodhisattvas should let their minds dwell in the teachings I have just given." (4) So the answer to Subhuti's first question is that in order to give rise to bodhicitta, a bodhisattva should not base on signs, but should base on these teachings.

Teacher is a form, friend is a form, house and garden is also a form. In order to nourish your bodhicitta you shouldn't base on form. Many people give rise to bodhicitta because they are attracted by a form, a sound, a smell, a taste, or a dharma, and they don't see deeply into those forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and dharmas. So that is why after a time they have the feeling that they are deceived, they are tricked, betrayed, and so they leave the path. It is the same in normal life. We are all looking for the good, the true, the beautiful. We have the feeling that we don't have those elements within ourselves, and that is why we are searching. In the world outside we are betrayed many times, and then when we come into the church or the temple we are deceived again. It presents itself as having the good, the beautiful and the true, but sometimes those elements are absent, so we have the feeling that we are cheated, we are betrayed again. So we have to learn to look deeply and break through. You have to look into the non-form elements, you have to discover the things behind the form, sound, smell, taste, and touch, and then you can understand. And when you understand you accept it completely, because you are not deceived anymore. We no longer try to escape, we don't run away any more.

Bodhisattvas should not base their bodhicitta on form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and dharmas. They should base their bodhicitta on non-attachment. "So, Subhuti, all the bodhisattva mahasattvas should give rise to a pure and clear intention in this spirit. When they give rise to this intention they should not rely on forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects or objects of mind. They should give rise to that intention with their minds not dwelling anywhere." (10) That means that you do not base your bodhicitta on the thinking that is based on form. "So, Subhuti, when a bodhisattva gives rise to the unequalled mind of awakening, he has to give up all ideas. He cannot rely on forms when he gives rise to that mind, nor on sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects or objects of mind. He can only give rise to that mind that is not caught up in anything." (14) So, the bodhisattva who would like to give rise to bodhicitta should not rely on form, the form of self, person, living being, and life-span.

"The Tathagata has said that all notions are not notions, and that all living beings are not living beings. Subhuti, Tathagata is the one who speaks of things as they are, speaks what is true, and speaks in accord with reality, he does not speak deceptively or to please people. Subhuti, if we say that the Tathagata has realised a teaching, that teaching is neither graspable nor deceptive." (14) If there is any dharma that we have obtained, then that is not the true dharma. So, does the Tathagata obtain the dharma? Subhuti said there is no dharma that the Tathagata has gained or obtained: "According to what I understand from the teachings of the Buddha, there is no attaining of anything called the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind." (17)

The idea of true gives rise to the idea of false and the idea of false gives rise to the idea of true. In the spirit of the Diamond Sutra we should see that there are pairs of notions, pairs of opposite ideas like self and non-self. We want to transcend the idea of self but then we can be caught into the idea of non-self. So the problem is that we have to transcend them both. There's the idea of human being and the idea of non-human being. There is the idea of living being and non-living being. We discriminate that those two are two separate things, but those two are interbeing, they are interpenetrating. Like in the compost we can see the flower and in the flower we can see the compost.

The idea of life-span, form, non-form, mark, non-mark, dharma, non-dharma, birth, death, coming, going, being, non-being, one, many; there are many opposite pairs of notions. The idea of true and the idea of false, of true awakening and false awakening. We think that true is not false. But if we don't see the non-true elements in what is true then it is not really the truth. We are grasping an idea of true and grasping an idea of false; that is very dangerous. So we have to transcend all of the opposite pairs of ideas, even the idea of true and false.

"Subhuti, a bodhisattva who still depends on notions to practice generosity, is like someone walking in the dark. He will not see anything. But when a bodhisattva does not depend on notions to practise generosity, he is like someone with good eyesight walking under the bright light of the sun. He can see all shapes and colours." (14) When we see something and our seeing is based on ideas and concepts, if we practice dana in relation to that way of seeing, then that is not true practice. Anyone who practices giving has to look with their eye that is not attached to the nature of discrimination, and then they can see the true nature of life.

When we practice dana we don't see that we are the one who gives and the other is the one who receives. We're not proud of that action. We don't require the other person to feel gratitude or respect toward us. Among us there are many people who feel betrayed. The other person has lived with us for 30 years. That person has made a great vow, a promise, a great commitment, saying that they will live with us forever. But now this person has changed their mind and has gone to follow another person. We have the feeling that we have been betrayed, and we suffer because of that. We say that we are the loyal person, we are the

person who has not made any mistake. The other person is the unloyal person, the person who has changed and who is causing a lot of suffering, and within ourselves we have a lot of enmity toward that person. But this has come about because during the time we have lived with that person we have not loved according to spirit of the Diamond Sutra. Even though the two people live together they are two separate islands. They are separated because of the idea of self, person, living being, and life span. So we have not loved the other person while being in touch with their suchness, we have not loved in the spirit of non-attachment, non-grasping. So that is why things have happened like this.

We love but we require that the other person has to love us back. We ask the other person to remember our help and we calculate every little bit of our hard work. We measure and weigh our hard work and we say I loved you so many kilograms, but you are terrible, you have not returned my love ten or twenty percent. So in our relationship with another person we behave like that, with discrimination in our mind, so our happiness is not very great. We cannot be one with the other person. The two persons who love each other are still two isolated realities. We are not the other person. We don't see the other person in us. We don't see that the other person is ourselves.

We cannot see ourselves clearly and we cannot see the other person clearly. We see the seed of loyalty within ourselves but we cannot see the seed of betrayal within ourselves. We cannot see that the seed of loyalty is also there in the other person. How have we lived together? How have we neglected the other person? We have not watered the seed of loyalty in the other person and we allow the seed of betrayal to be watered every day by the way we eat, talk, walk, smile, interact, while doing so we are caught in discrimination.

So the love is not great enough to keep both of us. Because when we look into ourselves we see only A, we cannot see the non-A elements within ourselves. We look into the other person and we see A only as A and we cannot see the non-A elements within him or her. So our interaction is very shallow, not very deep, and our love and our happiness are not deep, not profound. Change cannot be avoided, it has to happen, and now we blame the other person. The other person is responsible to a certain degree. But if we know that the other person is us, then we take care and protect the other person just like we take care of ourselves. Perhaps we don't even know how to take care of ourselves, protect ourselves. The Buddha has said that if we know how to protect ourselves, to take care of ourselves, then we are able to take care of the other person. We haven't known how to take care of ourselves. So perhaps we are responsible for what has happened to a certain degree. So we should not blame. All of our blaming is based on discrimination.

We have not learned to look deeply into the dharma so that we can see the non-dharma within the dharma. When we look into A, we cannot see the non-A elements within it, so we don't see deeply, we don't completely understand the nature of the reality of A. So every day we make mistakes, every day we commit wrong actions and that causes the results we are having right now.

Very often when we suffer, we have the tendency to blame the other person. We don't see that the other person has acted in such a way partly because of us. The other person is only a mirror reflecting us. If we are able to smile then the mirror would be able to smile back to us. The environment we live in is our own mirror. If we smile into the mirror then we get the smile back, if we frown then the mirror will frown back. Why can't we embrace that person, while the other people who live with him or her can? Is it because we don't have love, we lack understanding? We think that our suffering is due to the other person, but the main reason is that we are not able to embrace the other person. If we are able to love the other person, then this shows in our eyes, in our smile, in the way we act, and then we will be loved and we will receive love back.

So the practice is that we have to look deeply so that we can see the non-A elements in A. If we can see the non-A elements in A then we have the chance to see the true A, the suchness of A, the A of nishpanna. This is not a theory, this is not an intellectual conception, it is a practice. During the time the Buddha lived and practised he also had a lot of difficulties. But the Buddha overcame these difficulties because his capacity of looking deeply was very profound. This is why the Buddha did not blame the people who caused him suffering. There are people who have caused problems for the Buddha, like King Ajatasattu, like Devadatta. But the Buddha was able to help them. We are the students of the Buddha, why can't we follow in his path, in his footsteps? Why do we blame? Why do we discriminate? If we continue like that how can we advance in our everyday practice?

If we know how to look at things in the spirit of the Diamond Sutra, we can see the non-A elements in A, we can see the nature of interdependent origination behind the *vikalpa*. And when we discover the suchness of things, we are walking in the world of light, and we will not fall. If we don't have that way of looking, then we will walk in darkness, we will fall down and we will cause suffering for ourselves and for the other person. Subhuti, a bodhisattva who still depends on notions to practice generosity is like someone walking in the dark, he will not see anything. But when a bodhisattva does not depend on notions to practice generosity, he is like someone with good eyesight walking under the bright light of the sun, he can see all shapes and colours. (15)

"Subhuti, someone who wants to give rise to the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind should do it in this way: 'We must lead all beings to the shore of awakening, but, after these beings have become liberated, we do not, in truth, think that a single being has been liberated' Why is this so? Subhuti, if a bodhisattva is still caught up in the idea of a self, a person, a living being or a lifespan, that person is not an authentic bodhisattva." (17) We do not have the idea that we will help all beings to cross over to the other shore. If a bodhisattva thought he would help the other person to cross over to the other shore then he would be caught in the idea of a self, a person, a living being. "Subhuti, do not say that the Tathagata has the idea, 'I will bring living beings to the shore of liberation'. Do not think that way, Subhuti. Why? In truth there is not one single being for the Tathagata to bring to the other shore. If the Tathagata were to think there was, he would be caught in the idea of a self, a person, a living being and a lifespan." (25) So, the same formula is repeating in many different aspects of the teaching.

"Subhuti, what the Tathagata calls a self essentially has no self in the way that ordinary persons think there is a self. Subhuti, the Tathagata does not regard anyone as an ordinary person. That is why he can call them ordinary persons." (25) There are people we tend to think of as "bad", but we are responsible to a certain degree for their actions or behaviours. If they are caught by drink or drugs, if they are caught up in crime, then we also are responsible to a certain degree. Because we have organised society in such a way, we have taken care of our young generation in such a way, that they will be caught into drugs, alcoholism or crime. If we look into those people who we think of as bad and if we see that they are us, they are our responsibility, then we know our part. And when we look at those people we will not blame them, we will not have enmity toward them, but we will have the will to help them. We know that they are that way because of their background, the situation of society. So we will not look down on them, we will only love them and we will take the responsibility upon ourselves.

If you read these sentences deeply, the Tathagata doesn't call them a "bad" person even though they behave in such a way. So there is love, there is deep understanding, there is no discrimination, no blaming. We know that that person is ourselves. Because we have not done our best, we have not tried our best to organise society, we have not done our best to help, and this is why those people have become like that. So A is not A, therefore it is true A.

"What do you think, Subhuti, can someone meditate on the Tathagata by means of the 32 marks?" There is a practice of visualisation based on the 32 marks of the Buddha. When we suffer, when we are sad, in despair or angry, we sit down and visualise the 32 marks of the Buddha, and we feel peaceful in ourselves. Many Buddhists practise this. Often when we are sad we go into the Temple and look at the Buddha, or we go and sit down at the foot of a tree and visualise the 32 beautiful marks of the Buddha. It seems that Subhuti has the tendency to practice this visualisation, that is why the Buddha asked this question and Subhuti answered very quickly "yes". But right afterwards he was also able to say "no". The Buddha said: "If you say that you can use the 32 marks to see the Tathagata, then the Cakravartin is also a Tathagata." Subhuti said, "World Honoured One, I understand your teaching, One should not use the 32 marks to meditate on the Tathagata." (26) We can see the 32 beautiful marks, but we should be able to see the Tathagata beyond his marks, we have to see the Tathagata everywhere. Then the World Honoured One said:

"Someone who looks for me in form

or seeks me in sound

is on a mistaken path

and cannot see the Tathagata."

This is a very beautiful gatha and very well-known. You should learn it in Chinese.

"Subhuti, if you think that the Tathagata realises the highest most fulfilled awakened mind and does not need to have all the marks, you are wrong." (27) This is an important point of the teachings of the Buddha. We have talked about many different pairs of opposite notions: coming and going, birth and death, that we must not get caught in marks. So we have the feeling that the form, the mark, is dangerous and we have to leave behind all the forms. But the form is important, the Buddha continues: "Subhuti, do not think in that way. Do not think that when one gives rise to the highest, most fulfilled awakened mind, one needs to see all objects of mind as non-existent, cut off from life. Please do not think in this way. The one who gives rise to the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind does not contend that all objects of mind are non-existent and cut off from life." (27) So all the forms and marks are important for our practice, for our realisation. We need forms, but we are not caught in forms.

Please do not think that when we give rise to the highest most fulfilled awakened mind, we have to look at dharmas as annihilation. Throughout the last 2,600 years there have been many people, including some western Buddhist scholars, who think that this is what the Buddha taught, that our goal, our purpose is to go in the direction of total annihilation. But this is not true, please do not get caught into it. Many people have thought that the Buddha's teaching is one of annihilation, that its aim is non-existence, non-being. This is not true, this is not what the Buddha taught. Do not think that when one gives rise to the highest, most fulfilled awakened mind, one needs to see all objects of mind as non-existent, cut off from life. That is also being caught in a mark. So 'being' is a mark, but 'non-being' is also a mark. The Diamond Sutra is very clear. Why do we think that the teachings of Buddhism lead to annihilation?

We see that the rose is a mark. We say we should not get caught in the mark of the rose. However the mark of the rose is very important. Due to the mark of the rose we have the chance to look deeply into the non-mark of the rose. We look into the rose and we see the sunshine, the clouds, the earth, we see all of nature, we see the elements, the minerals, we see the sky, the people, we can see the whole cosmos through the mark of a rose. The mark of the rose is important in giving rise to our ability to look deeply. So please do not say that the rose is not there, we do not deny the existence of the rose. We read that there is "no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body or mind; no form, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no object of mind." It doesn't mean those things do not exist. What we mean is that the form, the mark of those things is deceptive. So the mark helps us to practice looking deeply to see the non-A elements within A, and then we can see the true the A. So the mark is very important. The Buddha didn't say we must look for the non-mark, because non-mark is also a mark. The Tathagata doesn't throw away anything, does not try to escape anything. The Tathagata recognises all the forms, but he is not caught in any form, any mark. He has the capacity to look deeply into all the marks and to see all of the non-mark elements within the mark.

The Tathagata has insight and wisdom, and that can help him to liberate himself from anger, from blaming, from enmity. And therefore all the teachings of the Buddha are based on looking deeply. Looking deeply is meditation, looking deeply helps you to see the nature of suchness, the nature of interdependent origination. The more you look deeply the more you are able to liberate yourselves from the nature of discrimination, and you will get in touch with the nature of interdependent origination and see the nature of suchness.

"After they heard the Lord Buddha deliver this sutra, the Venerable Subhuti, the bhiksus and bhiksunis, laymen and laywomen and the gods and asuras, filled with joy and confidence, undertook to put these teachings into practice." (32)

(Thay has made extensive commentaries on this sutra in a book which has been translated into English: The Diamond That Cuts Through Illusion. Next time we will study the 10 Great Vows of Samantabhadra in the Avatamsaka Sutra. We can learn it in Chinese.)

## The Diamond Sutra

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[Three sounds of the bell]

Dear Sangha,

Today is the 14th of December 1997. We are in the winter retreat of Plum Village. We are in the Upper Hamlet. Today we conclude talking about the Diamond Sutra before we go to another sutra. The Diamond Sutra is considered to be the basic sutra for the practice of dhyana, dhyana means the core teaching of the Buddha. Every dhyana school uses the Diamond Sutra. There are some sentences in the Diamond Sutra which look a little mysterious, such as; "We try to save countless living beings, but in fact there is no living being who is saved", and "The dharma is not the dharma, that is why that it is the right dharma", and "Wherever there is form, there is deception." Sometimes the language of Zen masters looks mysterious like that. And sometimes there are sentences like "What is the sound of the one hand clapping?" and, "What was your true face before your grandma was born?" or, "Everything goes to the one so where does the one go to". These koans look mysterious, but when you look deeply you can understand all these mysterious things.

The method that we use in order to understand the Diamond Sutra is the method of Vijnanavada, Buddhist psychology. If we can understand the Diamond Sutra, it is because we have looked at the Diamond Sutra under the lens of Buddhist psychology and the lens of the Avatamsaka Sutra. The basic teaching of the Avatamsaka Sutra is interpenetration, interconnection, interbeing. According to Buddhist psychology there are three natures that we have to remember: The first is discrimination, A is different from B, and different from C. But then the second of the three natures of Buddhist psychology is interpenetration, interconnection. And then, by seeing that, we discover the third nature, that's the true nature, and reality as it is will be revealed totally. Buddhist psychology helps us to see that in each of us there are many kinds of seeds, many varieties of seeds: there are positive seeds, there are neutral seeds, and there are negative seeds. And when the negative seeds are watered every day, you become a very negative person. If the positive elements are watered in you, you become a very joyful, helpful, wonderful person. So when you see a person, you see all the elements that make that person. There are many elements of their ancestors, and many elements of their environment.

You can use the Buddhist psychology in order to discover the Diamond Sutra. The second way to discover the Diamond Sutra is the Avatamsaka Sutra. The Avatamsaka Sutra is the sutra that helps us to see that one element is made of all other elements, and that the all is made of the one. When you look at A, you see B, C, D, E, F, G, H.... When you see B, C, D, E, F, G, H in A, you see everything in A, you see A is not A, that is why A is really A. So we look at the Diamond Sutra through the lens of Buddhist psychology and the lens of the Avatamsaka Sutra. The characteristic of the Avatamsaka Sutra is interpenetration, interbeing, interdependence.

Every week, we'll read the Diamond Sutra, but if you cannot catch the essence, the basic teaching, it is a loss. You have to really catch the basic teaching so that the wisdom, the insight, will grow every day in you. First of all, the Buddha has taught us that the bodhisattva is a person who has bodhicitta, who has the spirit of love. You have to learn to look at the world with non-discriminating eyes, non-discriminating view. First point: You look deeply at the world with non-discriminating eyes. (Thay in English:) An authentic bodhisattva should be able to look at and to view things with his or her non-discriminative mind.

The first point is non-discriminative mind. If you remember the teaching I often explain to you, look at your right hand, your right hand has a non-discriminating mind. The right hand never discriminates against the left hand, never discriminates the legs, the feet or any part of our body. So remember the image of the right hand next time you look at the sunshine, the squirrel, the snake, your lovely brother in the dharma, sister in dharma, your difficult brother or sister in the dharma. You look with the eyes of no discrimination, you are her, you are him, and she is you, he is you. You deal with everyone and everything with this non-discriminative mind.

The second point: If you want to learn the non-discriminative view, you must not be bound to any sign, any mark, any form. That is a kind of aide-memoire for you. What is a sign? It is the object of your perception. You perceive something and you have that sign in your mind, you are bound to that sign. Wherever there is a sign, a mark, an appearance, there is deception. So when we look at Sister Thuan Nghiem you see that she has an appearance at first, you see a self. But if you look deeply into the appearance of sister Thuan Nghiem, you see elements of her which are not her, so we are not caught. (Thay in English:) The second point is that in order to get the wisdom of non-discrimination you have to train yourself so that you are not caught by the appearance, by the object of your perception.

Third: If you don't want to be caught by sign, by form, you have to look deeply into the sign. It doesn't mean that you abandon the sign. You use the sign, but you look deeply, in order not to be caught by the sign.

(Thay in English:) The second point is that in order to get the wisdom of non-discrimination, you have to train yourself so you are not caught by the object of your perception. The third point is that in order not to get caught in the object of your perception, you have to look deeply in to that object of perception, into the nature of that object.

It means that you cannot throw away the sign, the object of your perception. If you don't want to be caught by the sign, by the object of your perception, you have to look deeply. So you should not abandon the sign - but you have to look deeply. There are some forms, some traditional forms, and may we think we practice the Diamond Sutra, we don't need all these forms... that is not the way. You have to look deeply into the nature of these traditional rituals and forms. In the beginning it seems silly, it seems not worth it, but you look deeper and you see something, but you are not caught, not attached.

So you look deeply into A, and you see that A is made of B, C, D, E, F, G, H....etc. You will not throw away A. The Buddha said to be caught by sign is bad, but it's worse if you are caught by non-sign. Therefore, if you want to look deeply, you have to see the characteristics of interdependence, interbeing, interpenetration of each thing. The characteristic of interpenetration, interbeing, is the true nature of things, it is not invented by the Buddha, it's discovered by him and you can discover it by yourself.

(Thay in English:) "The fourth point is that when you know how to look deeply, you begin to see the nature of paratantra, the nature of interconnection of the object of your perception."

In order to see nature, like a flower is made of non-flower elements, you see the characteristics of paratantra, paratantra is the Sanskrit word for interdependence. When you look at the flower, you see all the elements which are not the flower, like the sun, the cloud, the farmer, time, space, the love of the farmer, etc. And then you see that in order to look deeper, you have to see the interconnection, the interdependence, the interpenetration of the nature of things as they are. The more you see the true nature of paratantra, which means interpenetration, the more your ignorance, the more your discrimination will disappear. Your discrimination between the right hand and the left hand, the right arm and the left arm, the right leg and the left leg will disappear. (Thay in English:) "When you begin to discover the nature of interconnection, of interbeing, of the object of your perception, its nature of discrimination begins to withdraw, to fade away, and it's nature of perfection will start to appear. So the true nature of the 'reality as it is' will slowly appear."

Fifth: When the reality as it is, the character of perfection, appears, you have deep insight of the true nature of things as they are. The word 'kien tanh' is a very important word in Zen, in the teaching of the Buddha. The Japanese call it 'kensho'. The word 'kien



tanh' goes together with two other words 'minh tam', clear mind. Kien tanh means simply to see deeply the nature of the object of your perception. You see deeply the true nature of the object of your perception. The object of your perception could be a flower, could be pebble, or a sister in the dharma, a brother in the dharma... or your enemies. So the objects of your perception have signs and so you are tricked, you are deceived by them. But when you look deeper, then you discover the true nature of that person. And you see the characteristic of non-discrimination, the characteristic of paratantra, interconnection, interdependence, interbeing, the nature of no-birth no-death. You see the characteristic of perfection, reality as it is, and suchness. Suchness means things as they are, it is true reality in itself. Very few people understand the word kien tanh, the word tanh means the true nature of phenomena, the true nature of what is there.

You see that when your mind is full of illusion, then the object of your mind is also illusion. If your mind is caught by a wrong perception, then your way to see the world is very wrong, you see only the signs and you are caught by the signs. Every day we live in a very superficial way and so we only see things in a very illusory perception. You see each person as a very illusory reality of that person. You see every event as an illusory reality of that event. And because we live in a superficial way, the Buddha proposed that we live our lives deeper, look deeper and we touch the deeper image of that person, of that thing. Then thanks to a number of instruments I have mentioned already, you use paratantra, the characteristic of interdependence, and you can go through the curtain of illusory discrimination and reach the reality as it is, the characteristic of perfection of reality as it is, without being distorted. The more you look deeply, thanks to paratantra, thanks to the character of interpenetration, interdependence, the more you go deep into the character of interpenetration, interbeing. Then you arrive to the true perfection of the nature of the object of your mind, you arrive to the reality as it is, not the distorted reality that we are used to seeing. The Buddha said that 99% of our perceptions are wrong, illusory. So when your mind is superficial, you see things in a very illusory way. But more you look deeper, using the instrument of interbeing, interpenetration, then you arrive to the true nature, the true suchness of the reality as it is. So it's true landscape, true reality and true mind, and your mind will become true mind. So your true mind will touch the true reality. Now you have a deluded mind, a mind obsessed by a lot of deluded perceptions, and the signs present to you are very deluded. But with the same signs, you observe it deeply with the nature of paratantra, the nature of interconnection, and you'll get through the discriminative perception and see the suchness, the reality as it is. You attain kensho, 'kien tanh', and your mind is true mind.

Some teachers, especially in Vietnam, think that we have to die in order to reach the true nature of reality. That is completely wrong according to what the Buddha said. It's the same landscape, the same reality. You don't have to die. If your mind is more and more deep, your mind is more and more true, more and more you go into the depth of yourself, then the reality will reveal as it is, in its own depth. So true mind touches true reality, while the deluded mind will only be in touch with deluded images, deluded objects of your mind. So don't be too sure. You look at a person and you see many thousand years of their ancestors, you see many years, many decades, of their environment. When you see like that you are not shocked, you know that things are just like that, so then you cannot be angry. This is, because that is, this is not, because that is not, and when you see like that, you cannot be angry with anyone. The more you discover, the more you see the true reality, so when you can discover the use of the instrument of interpenetration and interdependence, then you can see the reality. You can see 10% of reality, 20% of reality, 60 % of reality, 80% of reality... It depends on your practice.

In many Zen centers people speak of 'kensho – kien tanh' in a very mysterious way, as though it is something you can never reach, but it's very simple. When we look at a person, we are attracted by that person, or we are repulsed by that person, we have no sympathy for that person, but don't be caught. The more you use the instrument of paratantra, the more you see the true nature of that person, and then you can see everything and can accept her or him. So your mind is a deluded mind, don't be so sure that your mind is true mind yet. Your deluded mind looks at the deluded reality, then you use the paratantra, the tool of interdependence, interconnection. The more you look, the more you see clearly, and true reality reveals itself to you 10%, 20%. (Thay in English:) "When our mind has become the true mind, enlightened mind, the nature of the object of our perception will reveal itself as suchness."

[Bell]

In one Buddhist chant there is a sentence; "I would like to have a true mind, a lucid mind, in order to touch the reality as it is and to stop the circle of samsara." That is the meaning of the chanting you often read in Vietnamese. So to break through the veil of signs, as a practitioner, you should not say that to see the reality as suchness is the work of 20 years of practice, no. You have to see the reality as suchness as you eat, as you drink, it is your daily practice. 'Minh tam kien tanh' here is obtained by our practice of looking deeply. It means to look deeply with paratantra and to see the nature of interconnection. You have to see the piece of bread as the reality as it is, your brother in the dharma as the reality as it is, your sister your, partner, your children, your colleagues at work as the reality as it is. That is not the result of ten years or twenty years of practice in a practice center. You can do it at home, at your work.

The sixth is that when you reach the reality as it is, you reach the point that we call no craving, no anger, no fear. If we have a lot of craving we do not have deep insight. If we have a lot of anger we do not have true mind. If we have a lot of fear, we do not have that true mind, true insight. Craving means craving for something, we usually run after the object of our craving, but that craving may be a sign. We crave for that because we do not see the true nature of the object of our craving. Let's say money, let's say sex, let's say fame, let's say good food, wealth, if we run after these cravings, it is because we do not see the reality of the object of our mind as it is. So you have to look deeply into money, you look deeply into sex, you look deeply into fame. You do not throw them away, you look deeper and you see how things like that have brought you a lot of suffering, a lot of difficulties. The Buddha used to say that craving is like holding a torch against the wind, the fire will burn you. Craving is like bones without flesh. The dog chews the bone without flesh and never feels satisfied. Like somebody who is thirsty and drinks only salty water, the more he drinks, the more he is thirsty. We keep running after money and we think that just that amount of money will make us happy. When you have that amount of money it's always not enough, because people always want to have more. And then you run after more and more and more and more money. There are people who have a lot of money, but they are not happy at all. In the supermarket you can buy bones without flesh for dogs, the Buddha said that the object of your craving is like these bones without flesh. The dog bites it all the time, and never feels satisfied. The more you have, the more you want, and the more you are thirsty, craving is death. The Buddha also illustrated it like this: there is one little bird which catches some food, and the big birds want to eat the little birds. So the little birds have to release the food, so that the big birds will eat the food and not kill the little bird. If the little bird is craving for the food, it will die immediately.

The Buddha illustrated this by ten cases of craving that lead us to sufferings, difficulties, and accidents. In Plum Village I use other illustrations. I say that when people went fishing in the past they used a real little fish or real insects in order to hook the fish. But nowadays they use plastic bait, they put it on the hook and the fish think that it is real food for them and they are hooked. So the sign is delusion and you have to look deeper to see that it is not worth to run after it. You can go deep into the nature of no craving for that sign, and then you see that money is not something that we need to crave for. We need some, for basic use, but not so much, and if we have enough, why do we have to run and run, and cause a lot of misery to each other. 'Kien' is to see deeply, 'tanh' is the true nature of things. So when you practice kien tanh, you see deeply the true nature of the object of your craving and you will be healed, you arrive at non-craving, 'alobha'. Then you do not run after the object of your craving and you feel so free, so happy. Kensho also gives us no-anger.

Try to look deeply into the person who you think is the object of your anger. The one who causes a lot of difficulties to you and your beloved ones, who causes a lot of injustice to you. If you look deeply into the object of that anger, you see with the look of paratantra that that person is made of so many elements. You see all his past, his present, his childhood, he is not very lucky, he does not have a teacher around, a good friend around. He is unhappy, he suffers, and so he causes a lot of suffering around him. So when you understand like that, instead of feeling hatred, you accept him, you have compassion for him. If you cannot have enough compassion, if you cannot accept that person it is because you don't know all the conditions that have made him, or her. So when you see a delinquent, a person who is alcoholic, a drug user, and sometimes they have to steal some of our

money. You are very angry and you want to punish them and put them in jail. But when you understand deeply, you see that if you found yourself in his situation with all your unwholesome seeds watered by friends, you see that you'd behave exactly like him. When you see all these things, you can only feel compassion, you do not want to punish him anymore, you only want to do your best to help him to get out of that situation. Then you are a person who has no anger, you'll be a free and happy person. And if you have no anger, it is because you have deep insight of the reality as it is, his reality as it is, her reality as it is.

Kien tanh leads us to the state of no fear, 'abhaya'. Abhaya is fear, we always have a lot of fear, fear to be left alone, fear to die, fear to be lonely, to have no money, to be homeless. We have that fear because we do not look deeply into the object of our perception, for example the fear of death, we all fear death. Imagine that one day we will be a corpse that cannot move, cannot speak, cannot do anything, and everyone will get around us and weep. Everybody is afraid of that, but there are people who see deeply into the true nature of death, and they have no more fear of death. Because they can see the true nature of death, they have no fear. I don't know if you have visited the lotus pond in New Hamlet last year, the lotus pond in New Hamlet teaches you a lot. Those of you who have been in New Hamlet last summer have seen that there were a lot of lotuses in the pond, beautiful lotuses. There are people who say that the first time they see a lotus they don't feel that it is a true flower, because it's so beautiful. During summer there are hundreds of people that sit around the lotus pond and admire the lotuses. But now, in winter, if you visit the lotus pond you cannot believe it. It's so ugly, so called ugly, you don't see lotus flowers at all, only rotten leaves, rotten stem, rotten receptacle... nothing.

There is a Vietnamese poet, Tan Da, who said that because of the rotten leaves of the lotus we are crying for the death of the flower. In the past the flower was so beautiful, and now the flower is dying and we are crying, that poet is caught by birth and death, by a sign. That's the wrong perception, the wrong image of the lotus pond. Last week I saw the lotus pond and I did not feel any tears in my eyes, I did not feel sad at all. I did not cry, because I saw that the rotten leaves are preparing diligently for the wonderful spring. This is because I've overcome the sign, I can look deeply into the rotten leaves of lotus and I see that it is preparing. You look on the surface of the lotus pond, imagine a lotus leaf, fresh, green in summer. These fresh, green leaves are very beautiful. When you put a few drops of water on it, the drops of water will become like diamonds. But now these green leaves are rotten and the lotus leaves are dead. But if you see the fresh lotus leaf is so fresh and so green, that is because there is the rotten leaf before. So, the rotten leaf is preparing diligently for new fresh green leaves that will appear in a few months. It's preparing not only green leaves, fresh leaves, but can also give a very good root. The lotus root is very delicious to eat, the sisters used to cook them for me. So these rotten leaves are working hard, diligently, joyfully to prepare for fresh leaves to be born, for delicious food, and for beautiful lotuses, very soon, in summer. And so these rotten leaves are working and enjoying transforming in order to make the root wonderful, the leaves wonderful, the flower wonderful. And you only see the rotten leaves and you cry, you are craving. So the rotten leaf is investing a lot for the lotus root, for the fresh green leaves, for the wonderful flower. When you come and you ask the rotten lotus leaf: "Where are you now, I am crying." The lotus leaf may smile at you and say: "No, I'm not dying, I'm preparing to be more wonderful in my continuation."

When you walk here in walking meditation, you see a lot of rotten leaves on your path and you say: "Oh, how sad, how sad that these leaves are dying." You don't see that the whole spring, the whole summer these leaves continue to circulate in the tree, circulate in the branches, circulate everywhere. The leaves have absorbed sunshine, absorbed gas, and absorbed root sap in order to prepare themselves and expand everywhere. When the rotten leaf left the tree it's just a little part of herself, the greater part of herself is everywhere in the branches, in the trunk, in very silent preparation. During six or seven months that leaf has worked very hard and expanded herself everywhere, she is in the branches, the many layers of the trunk that are growing, and the many layers of the branches that are growing. So that leaf is this bigger branch than last year, this leaf is this bigger trunk than last year. You can see that this leaf is there in many forms. So you look at the tree, you see the leaf, you look at the sign of the tree, you see the leaf, you look at the sign of the leaf, you see the tree.

One day you will see me as a corpse, very rigid, hard, in the bed and you'll cry a lot, then you are caught by a sign. You have to see me everywhere in you, in many lay people, in many monks and nuns, in many of my readers, everywhere people can be in touch with me. I am there in their heart, I am there in their mind, I am there in their behavior. And you can see me everywhere. Don't cry because of that corpse that has become immobile. That corpse will be rotten. You will see that I am in the behavior of some of my readers, who, after reading my books feel motivated to do a lot of beautiful work. You will see me in yourself, in how much transformation you have in your own being. When you have met me, you see me in many friends of yours, in many brothers and sisters, everywhere. So, don't be tricked by my sign. The sign that you thought to be me. The Buddha said that every time you see a sign, that is a delusion.

The rotten lotus leaf needs only the heat of May and you will see beautiful leaves, beautiful lotuses. So when you see my corpse, rotten, you cry... No, this is a very deluded way to behave. You will see that when the conditions are sufficient, I will manifest in yourself, I will manifest in the people around you, in those who have been in touch with me. If you are afraid that I die, why don't you make myself grow in you. If you are afraid that I die, why don't you try to make me big in you, born in you, grown in you, grown up in you? Then you will behave like me, better than me. So you are not caught by the sign, and you see the nature of no birth, no death of the reality and you are not afraid of anything, no fear. Next Thursday you will look at the rotten lotus leaves in the lotus pond and you will ask the rotten lotus leaves: "Hello, where are you, where are you now? Where do you come from and where do you go?" And you will see the joyful preparation and journey of the rotten leaf, and then you will transcend every fear.

In this world there are a lot of people dying and there are those who work for dying people in order to help the person who is dying, to die peacefully, joyfully. These people have to learn this way of looking deeply. When you look at things deeply like that, then you have no fear in you. And when you have no fear in you, then you can sit stably, without fear in yourself. Because you must be fearless of death in order to help people not to be fearful of death. If you are so afraid of dying, how can you help dying people? So you have to learn that this body is not you. You are not caught by this body, this body is one little part of yourself. When you feel like that, you live like that, you are not afraid of dying at all. Then you can take the hand of somebody who is dying, and you tell her or him that this body cannot touch you. You are much larger than this body. You take the hand of the dying person and you say: "You are much larger than this body. You are life without boundaries. You are your daughter, your son, your grandson, the descendants of your descendants. You are your students, you are your readers, you are your friends, those who are in touch with you, inspired by you, who love you, so you are not caught by this body. You are much more than this body." If you speak like this to that dying person, that dying person can die peacefully, without fear, because you yourself are without fear.

[Bell]

Seventh: Three qualities: no craving, no anger, no fear. This "no anger, no fear, no craving" will help the bodhisattva to practice generosity, to practice the mindfulness trainings, the precepts, to practice concentration, in a very natural way. These three qualities will help the bodhisattva to practice the precepts, to practice sharing, to practice inclusiveness, to practice diligence, to practice concentration in a very natural way, without any effort, without discrimination. When he is breathing, when he is eating, when he is drinking, he does so without any effort. When we have these three characters, these three qualities "no craving, no anger, no fear", then we know that we have a non-discriminating mind. Then we can realize the sharing, the practice of the precepts, the practice of inclusiveness, the practice of diligence, the practice of concentration in a very natural way, without any effort, without any discrimination, exactly like we are breathing every day. So, doing like that, you are a bodhisattva, because if a bodhisattva is very aware that he is a bodhisattva, he is not a real bodhisattva. So you do it naturally, like you breathe, like you smile, like you walk.

In the practice of many Zen centers, they have the tendency to think that 'kien tanh' is the true ability to understand ourselves. That is correct too, but only partially. We should not be caught by the word saying that kien tanh is to see the true nature of the object of your mind. The object of your mind could be the moon, the flower, the trees, but the object of your mind could be your own being. So you understand the true nature of the lotus leaf, you can see the true nature of your own being. Because you see

you, you see your ancestors, you see your parents, you see your sister, you see yourself as your sister, you see yourself as your parents, you see yourself as your sister, your brother, you see yourself as your colleague, you see yourself as all human beings, you see yourself as all living beings, you see yourself in the plants, trees and everything. So in many Buddhist Zen centers they think that kien tanh means only to see your true mind. That is correct, but it is not sufficient. You understand your body which means you understand your mind. You understand your body and your mind. You see the object of your mind too. You look deep into your body, you see that your body makes your mind and your mind makes your body. So there is no separation between body and mind. Body is mind and mind is body.

Many of today's scientists also want to learn how to transcend the sign. They also start to see that the non-discriminating mind can help people to go far. Many physicists have seen that elementary particles are like a kind of energy. Sometimes the energy can be illustrated as an electron, the small particles of an electron sometimes look like a particle. Electrons sometimes appear as particles, sometimes appear as waves. Sometimes the electron does not appear as particle, but it appears as wave, it's strange. The same electron sometimes appears as wave, sometimes appears as particle. In one experience it appears as wave, in another experience it appears as particle. So they cannot accept the argument that if it is a particle it must be only a particle, and not a wave. And the truth is like that. So sometimes they act as particles, sometimes they act as waves. So finally they have to accept that both are one. So particle is not a true sign of an electron and wave is not a true sign of an electron, so they call it a wavicle, that's a new name.

In Buddhism we have that too, 2600 years ago the Buddha also said: body and mind, he used the word namarupa. They do not distinguish body as different from mind. Nama is our mind and rupa is our form, our body. So the Buddha called our body and mind namarupa. Sometimes you appear as nama, sometimes you appear as rupa. We are both, so the Buddha said namarupa. The psychologists today call it psyche-soma. So, don't be caught by the sign, the Diamond Sutra makes this very clear. If the scientists continue to argue, some of them saying that the electron is just particle and others that it's only wave, it is because it is wave and particle. So we see that more and more science approaches the teachings of the Buddha. We have to transcend sign in order to touch the deep reality as it is. So a good scientist, in order to touch deeply the true reality, has to release his knowledge about the objects of his mind and release the principle of identity. To always try to give an identity to everything is not correct when you see things deeply, there is no separated identity. This identity is made by millions of other identities, in order for this identity to be real identity. So a good scientist now says that we have to erase the distinction between the observer and the observed. It's better to be a participant than to be an observer, that is the erasing of the distinction between the observer and the observed object. So instead of being an observer, we try to be a participant, and that is very close to the way we practice Buddhism. So please come to Plum Village as a participant, not as an observer.

In this winter retreat we try to practice Noble Silence from the evening after sitting meditation until after lunch. During this retreat, if you practice silence during half of the day, you will discover that a number of the sentences you speak may not be necessary. In that practice, when you feel that you want to speak, you don't speak but you take a booklet and you write it down. Then another moment later when you want to speak, you don't speak but you write it down, then the day after, you look at it and then you feel that it is so funny. It's not necessary, these sentences are not necessary at all. In us there is a kind of habit energy that pushes us to act or to speak in a way that we don't want to. We know that if we speak like that, it will destroy a lot. We know, we are quite intelligent to know that if we do like that, if we act like that, it destroys, but we still destroy, we still speak, we still act. We also know that if we do like that we will lose our friendship, we cause a lot of suffering to ourselves but we still do it. That is what we call habit energy. There's a kind of negative habit energy that pushes us to do like that.

So when you practice silence for half of the day, it is in order to observe this negative habit energy. You can write down in your booklet: "Today at half past nine I have been pushed by things, but I stopped." and "This morning that habit energy stood up and pushed me to act like that, but I have stopped." So if you practice silence for half of the day like that, you will discover a lot. If you don't practice silence until early morning after breakfast, try to practice this properly. Everyone should have a notebook in order to write down all the urges born in your mind, these urges are your habit energy. Sometimes they may be good, but most of the time they're unnecessary. So write them down and recognize them only. You recognize them, that does not mean that you transform them right away. But the fact that you recognize them is quite enough to transform them slowly. Silence is in order to help us to observe, but not for my benefit, it's for your benefit, to observe your negative energy. There are those who practice half of the day of silence and feel so happy, they want to prolong it longer.

Your whole being will express in other ways. Sometimes we feel that if we pronounce that sentence, it will show caring, but in fact without pronouncing that sentence, your look, your way of approaching, your way of helping silently shows a lot of caring, much more than some diplomatic words. The practice is helping you to observe yourself, to observe a number of habits that you can identify as "good, neutral, or not good", in order to transform ourselves. We have heard a lot about bodhisattvas and we always have the impression that a bodhisattva is someone who is very beautiful, very wonderful, very holy, and that you will never be a holy person like the bodhisattvas. In fact bodhisattvas are just people like you, who are trying to practice these points in order to live their life deeply, not in a superficial way. When you hear something, when you look at something, you try to look deeply, see deeply in order to go through the deluded sign, in order to reach the true nature of that person. If you are still angry with that person, if you are still fearful of this person, it's because you see their deluded form. When you see their true nature, then you can reach them, you can accept them and live happily with them. You can be a bodhisattva even if you are only 14 years old you don't need to wait until you become a monk or a nun and receive the big ordination in order to be a bodhisattva. A bodhisattva could be 14 years old.

You are a person who has a lot of happiness, a lot of freedom; free from your anger, free from your craving, free from your fear. And you understand via the paratantra, you can understand the most difficult people, you show a lot of care, of love, yet you are silent in order to observe your negative energy, observe, transform... then you can be a bodhisattva at the age of 14, 15, 18, 20, 50, 60. Then this community will be a pure land, because everybody will adorn the community. We adorn the community without knowing that we are adorning the community. Like in the Diamond Sutra: the bodhisattvas are those who adorn the Buddha Land, without knowing that they are adorning the Buddha Land. So you will become a bodhisattva, you adorn this Land without knowing that you are adorning this Land. You adorn it beautifully by the way you breathe, you eat, you walk, and you transform. When you go home, if you can touch the members of your family, they will become like you, and your family will become a Buddha Land without knowing that it is a Buddha Land. There are some satellites that can go very fast through the air. You also can do like this, if you are a bodhisattva. I know there are a number of you whose presence causes a lot of joy and peace for the community, they are bodhisattvas. There are also those who are present in this community who do not offer a lot, but still offer some, they are also bodhisattvas. So we have great bodhisattvas and bodhisattvas who are less great, but you all are bodhisattvas if you care to practice properly, diligently and then the speed of your practice will go very fast, like the speed of light.

Akalika is the practice that does not need time. As soon as you decide to begin practicing, you obtain freedom right away, you obtain peace right away, you obtain no craving, no anger right away. The practice of silence is in order to observe your negative energy and to transform it. In summary, a bodhisattva is not a legendary personality, bodhisattvas are you, you all. Even if you are very young. You don't need to know all of the teachings of the Buddha, you only need to listen for one hour to the teaching of Thay and if you practice right away you will become a bodhisattva right away, you don't need time to become a bodhisattva. You understand, then you love, and you will not reproach anybody, you are a living bodhisattva in this life.

[Three sounds of the bell]

# The Discourse on Love

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Winter Retreat 1997/98 18 December 1997

Dear Sangha, today is Thursday, the 18 December 1997, we are in the New Hamlet in the winter retreat. Today we are studying the Discourse on Love. In the teachings of the Buddha there are the four immeasurable minds. The first one is loving kindness, maitri in Sanskrit, mettā in Pali. The practice of love is very important.

"Those who want to attain peace should practice being upright, humble and capable of using loving speech. "If we are disturbed, we cannot have peace and we cannot have joy. Our mind is thirsty we feel we lack something. We are agitated by anger, hatred thoughts of revenge. We have no peace, no joy, we never feel happy. Even those who have a lot of material possessions and money in their bank account have no peace and joy and they are very unhappy.

Peace and joy are the two basic elements for our happiness. Peace means not to be disturbed not agitated in our mind. Those who want to attain peace have to learn the art of being straightforward. This means not to make insinuations, not go about things in a devious way. But we must use loving speech. We are straightforward, but we use loving speech. When we need something we say it frankly, but we say it with loving speech. There is a Vietnamese poet who says that if you love somebody, you have to say you love them, if you hate somebody you have to say it directly and frankly, even if someone puts a knife to your neck. So, our behavior must be straightforward, honest, clear, simple and humble. Humble means not to be sure that you are number one. Everybody must learn every day. The Buddha, even though he is The Enlightened One, learned more every day. So we have to learn to be humble.

In order to be happy, we have to learn to live simply. When you live simply, you have much more time and you can be in touch with the many wonders of life. Living simply is the criterion for the new culture, the new civilization. With the development of technology people nowadays have become more and more sophisticated and they don't live simply at all. Their joy is to go shopping. Even when we visit a new city, we cannot do anything else but go shopping. Shopping is a disease of our new civilization. The criterion for being happy is to live simply, and have a life of harmony and peace in yourself and with people around you, without aggressiveness, irritation and anger. Those who easily get angry have to learn the art of mindful breathing. When you are easily irritated you have to go back to your breath right away and take good care of your conscious breathing, calming and releasing, so that your face will not be red from anger and irritation. We must learn to know what is our limit, how much is enough. It is the opposite of wanting more and more and more. You know what is sufficient, what is enough for you.

You keep your calm; you will not be carried away by your emotions and the opinions of the majority. An advertisement says: "You must buy that", and then everybody goes out to buy it. When someone says: "that man needs to be beaten", then people can be carried away by the emotions of the majority.

In French literature there is a story about a man who wanted to revenge a cheap merchant. The man, on a trip across the sea, bought a sheep from the merchant and threw that sheep into the sea. All the other sheep of the merchant followed the first sheep into the sea, and the merchant lost everything. We are all like those sheep. We are easily carried away, like the crews who see one ship going into the ocean so they all go into the ocean. Everybody gets angry, so you get angry. Everybody gets excited, so you get excited. We are usually carried away

by the big group. We have to be master of the situation in order not to be carried away by the majority.

The Buddha said that we should not do anything that will be disapproved of by the wise ones. He didn't say let us not do anything that will be disapproved by the high monks or by the arahats. He said the wise ones, because he knew that outside of his Sangha there were many wise persons, in other spiritual traditions.

"May everyone be happy and safe and may their heart be filled with joy." Our first wish is that everyone will be happy and safe. Safe means that you have no accident, there is no natural disaster, no catastrophe, no fire, no robbery, no war and no accident, and you are not attacked by people who want to rob or kill you. Everybody wants to be safe, so we wish that everybody will be safe, not only ourselves. When we go on the airplane we put on the safety belt and we wish that everyone will be safe.

In the Vietnamese text there is a very beautiful word, a compound word meaning very stable. The first word means kind and the second word means very thick. If you say somebody is not very thick, it means sometimes he is good and sometimes he's not. But if you say somebody is thick, it means the person is good and has a lot of stability. People in Vietnam used to say that the Earth is very thick, and when praising someone who is very stable and solid they would say he is very thick like the earth. We have a high monk in Vietnam with this word in his name. When somebody has a lot of virtue and stability then they say this person has a lot of thickness. If they say someone is thin, it means that person will easily betray you. But if somebody is thick it is very good. We also say: "I take care of you thickly". Thickly in this sense means very deeply, profoundly. Ksitigarbha is a bodhisattva representing the earth. And before the sutra on Ksitigarbha, there is a gatha, which speaks of the earth-like qualities of Ksitigarbha, and the words thickness and stability are repeated several times.

"May all living beings live in security and peace". To be free means you are not attached by anything. There are those who work but who are too attached to the work, are not free from the work. In English they're called workaholics. So, we work very well but we are not workaholics, we are not attached, caught by the work. May all living beings live in security and peace. This is not action yet; it's just wishful thinking. But when the wishful thinking is great, it will bring us to the real action. If you do not wish to become a monk or nun then you will never become a monk or nun. You have to wish more than 100 percent that you will become a monk or a nun. So the wishful thinking is a very important energy to lead you to an action. We wish that all can live peacefully on earth; we wish that there is peace in our hearts. We wish it to be safe for ourselves, but we also wish that those around us will be safe, and also those who are far away. Not only that human beings but that animals, plants, the earth, the air, the mountains, the rivers, the ocean will be safe, that your environment will be safe, as will the environment of other humans, living beings, vegetation and minerals.

"Those who are frail, those who are strong." When we are frail we are easily overcome. But when we are strong we also can be overcome. When you live in the forest, even though you are stronger than the rabbit there are always other animals who are stronger than you. And the strong animal could be overcome by a stronger animal. And strong animals also can be killed by small animals. In the sutra, the Buddha used to say that lions can be killed by parasites, the little living beings in his own body. That is to say that nobody can destroy us except ourselves. When we are mindful we can see that there are many little habit energies in us that can kill us more readily than people outside ourselves. So the small things like doubt, fear, jealousy, anger are more likely to kill you than is the lion outside.

"Those who are tall, short, big, small, visible, not visible." Two thousand six hundred years ago the Buddha already saw that there are invisible living beings. Now we know about bacteria, viruses, but at that time he saw already. "Visible or not visible, near or far away, already-born or yet-to-be-born, may all of them dwell in perfect tranquility."

"Let no one do harm to anyone, let no one put the life of anyone in danger." We don't want any species to kill other species, we don't want any species to despise the life of another species and destroy the life of another species. When we read that sentence and we look deeply, we may discover a lot. You have to read the sutra with your serene mind and then you can discover many things that in the past you thought you understood but now you see that you did not. You see that the lion kills the deer, to eat. We cannot tell the lion not to kill. The lion is a carnivore and the lion must eat meat. But the lion only catches a deer when he is hungry. And when he is finished he leaves the remains for other carnivores to eat, like the wild dogs. But human beings don't need to kill, they are not hungry. But they still go hunting and kill deer and rabbits. In the past humans sometimes did not have enough plants and they had to kill some animals to eat, but only when they needed to. Nowadays, there is plenty of food in

the market, but many people still go hunting. Every time I hear the noise of the hunting, I feel a lot of pain in my heart. How can people be so cruel to each other and to other living beings? They are not hungry. Our life is so precious. But the life of other species is also precious. The lives of other species are precious not only for them but for humans too. When we kill the other species, then we put ourselves in danger too.

During the war in Vietnam we can see that the generals of the US Army are not taught to respect life. They just kill everyone. They are not taught to save as many lives as possible. When you sit on the plane and you drop a bomb you kill a number of soldiers, but you also kill a lot of civilians. The United States is a very rich country and they have a lot of bombs. But they don't know anything about what happens underneath. They never see deeply what happens down there when the bomb explodes. There are children who were just born; there are children only three years old. Not only are they killed but they are handicapped because of these bombs, and they suffer all their life. When I say this I do not say that only Americans are bad, but the other side also did not respect life. During the war a lot of civilians died. And people always pay attention to the success of the battle, they never think of how many people die, how many innocent civilians die. And they don't care much about the minds of people, their unhappiness. The US Government did everything possible to protect the lives of American soldiers, but the American Government never paid attention to the lives of the Vietnamese soldiers on either side. Those who have gone through the war in Vietnam see very clearly that only the American soldiers' lives were protected, but Vietnamese soldiers' lives on both sides were not protected at all, and they didn't care at all for the lives of civilian people. So the life of the nationalists, the Vietnamese soldiers on the pro-American-side, they were also not protected at all. And the lives of the civilians are nothing.

"May no one do harm to anyone, let no one put the life of anyone in danger." When we are angry, we have the tendency to punish in order to feel less angry. We always have that tendency, that when we are angry, when we suffer, we want the other person to suffer too, we want to punish the other person. We think that the more the other person suffers, the more we will be happy, or at least we will feel less unhappy. So the Buddha taught that when you are angry, you look deeply to see that you are suffering. When you are angry you are suffering. And when you are suffering learn not to let other persons suffer; learn to transform our tendency to punish into the tendency to forgive. We suffer already don't let other people suffer.

"Let no-one do harm to anyone. Let no one put the life of anyone in danger. Let no one out of anger or ill-will wish anyone any harm." Here is the teaching of the Buddha about one of the fifty-one states of our mind. This is ahimsa, "no harming". Of course, we can struggle. Buddhism does not ask you not to struggle. But you struggle with the energy of love, not with the energy of anger. You have to have the wish to reach the aim that you struggle for, like for example the liberation of the country. But you can use the energy of love, of understanding. Don't use the energy of anger. Because if you use anger there is confusion. And with confusion and ignorance you can do much damage, and then we have to retreat, and it causes a lot of suffering.

Now the Buddha teaches us how to take action. "Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, we should cultivate boundless love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos." The mother always gives a lot of care to her baby. She carries it nine months in her womb, she gives birth to her child, and she takes good care of her child. So "just like a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, we should cultivate boundless love". So we learn to cultivate boundless love for the person who sits next to us on our left, on our right. How can we learn to love the person on our left like our only child? How can we learn to love the person on our right like our only child, and at the risk of our own life? And we have that love also for our father, our mother, our sister, our brother, and our neighbor.

When the baby is just conceived in the womb of the mother, the baby is small like a little bean. At that time, the baby and the mother are one. The baby grows and grows and the baby is still one with the mother. When the baby is really big in the womb of the mother they are still linked by the umbilical cord, and everything the mother eats, drinks, thinks, will enter into the womb and into the mind of the baby. When the mother suffers the baby suffers, when the mother is joyful the baby is joyful, if the mother is mindful the baby is mindful. If you have no chance to have a baby then your baby is the baby Buddha in you. Don't think that only women can have a baby, men also have a baby. The baby Buddha in us needs to be protected. When the baby is big enough to be born people use a scissors to cut the umbilical cord. We don't see the umbilical cord anymore but we can still see that the mother and the child are very linked. The view that you and the baby are one is correct. But if you hold your baby and force it to be exactly like you, this is not correct either. It's good that you are one with your baby. But the baby receives other influences as well, and especially when the baby grows up she or he could have new insights. Every mother has to learn to train herself to see that your baby, your child is at the same time you but different from you. She or

he has his or her own life. You cannot imprison your child and make them go in your direction and force him or her to do what you like because you want to shape her or him in your mould. That is not correct. Because they are not only the continuation of you, but they are the continuation of many generations of ancestors before you, and perhaps during your time you had no chance to water the good seeds you inherited, and so you don't have the same chance as your child. And when he or she has a lot of new insights, you have to learn from her or from him.

We have to learn to see that we are one with our brother, our sister, our child, our son, and our daughter. Of course, when we see like that then we love everyone. Then we learn to know that those who are not linked to us by an umbilical cord are also deeply linked to us; we see this when we look deeply. And we also need to train ourselves to see that others are us. In the past we praised the king and said he was a very great king because he loves all his citizens as his own sons or daughters. This is a Vietnamese proverb, that "a good king is a king who loves every citizen like his own baby." Literally it says "like the child who is still red", that is who is just born. You take good care of your citizens as if they were your own children. So if you are the king your duty is to bring happiness to all the people in your nation. That truth is not only in Buddhism, but is a deep insight that belongs to many other religions too.

"Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, we should cultivate boundless love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos." This sentence only has meaning if we know how to put it in our daily activities. Everybody would like to love people in that way. But how can you love everyone like you love your own child? According to me, love is the most precious thing in life. There is one thing that has some meaning and that is love. In the Samyukta Nikāya in the Pali Canon the Buddha said the practice of love is the most beautiful thing. In the Agamas, the Chinese Canon, it says practicing love is the purest thing. I think that is an incorrect translation. Because for me practicing maitri is practicing beauty. In order to love properly you have to understand the other person. You cannot claim to love somebody if you don't understand him or her. If somebody has no love at all that person will be a very lonely person. We look around us; we see those who suffer a lot, that is those who have no love at all. She doesn't love herself she doesn't love others. He doesn't love himself he cannot love anyone. Such a person is the most unhappy person on earth. But if you see in yourself a lot of love, you want to love that tree, that flower, the earth, that girl, that boy, that man, that women, then you feel that you are the happiest person on earth.

When you make another person smile, you do something to make another person feel relief, then suddenly you feel very happy. If you do not have a chance to do something to relieve someone else but you have the will to be able to relieve him or her, already that good will is making you happier. Someone who does not have the energy of love, who do not have any will to love, that person is very lost, very lonely and very unhappy. For them this loneliness is like hell, and they feel lost, miserable. So we have to learn to know that loving is a means to help us to make a link between ourselves and other people and other species around us. And we see that we and they are linked deeply by one thing, and that is life. And when we feel that we are one, linked by that deep ocean of life, then we won't have any desire to punish the other person. If you feel hurt by another person try to look deeply at what is behind her mistake, her shortcoming, his un-skillfulness. When we try to understand in that way then we feel free from hurt.

Love is the most beautiful thing in this life. And love helps us to have an open mind and to understand better. Love is the most beautiful gift. Our mindfulness is like a mirror. The mirror reflects our body and our mind. In the early morning when you wake up, you look at the mirror and you see your body, and you smile so that your face looks more relaxed. The most beautiful thing of life is love, and an open mind, large view. Try to be open, to listen and to understand more deeply. Those are the most beautiful things of life: understanding, an open mind, to listen and to understand more deeply. We look at things with an open mind, with attention and with a compassionate view. So I advise you in the early morning when you wake up to look in the mirror and smile. Smile to your face, smile to life. And also learn to love yourself and love people around you with an open mind, with deep listening and deep understanding. So you look at somebody with forgiveness, with inclusiveness, but not in observation and discrimination. Look like a mother looks on her fragile little baby.

If you want to practice diligently you must keep a little booklet in your pocket and write notes. Every day that has been offered to you is a very precious day. In Plum Village I know that a number of you have had to abandon everything in order to come here, either for one year, six months, three months or one, five or seven days. That means a lot of preparation. So one day is a lot if you practice properly. So when you have one day of mindfulness you have to organize properly. When we organize a day of mindfulness we have to prepare beautifully: who will take care of walking meditation, who will take care of guided meditation, who will take care of the silent meal, of Touching the Earth etc. You organize a day of mindfulness like that, so why don't you organize yourself, organize

your days. When you come here for one day, you must organize it in such a way that every minute of the day will be very precious. Don't let the days drift away in forgetfulness. In the early morning, when you do sitting meditation, why don't you use that time to look deeply in order to see that: "I decided to make this day wonderful, I decided to make this very day a great gift for my life and for the life of others around me." Why, when we do sitting meditation do we just sit and wait for the bell to ring in order to announce the ending of sitting meditation. That is a waste. So, sitting meditation time is to look deeply, to prepare how we can make our day wonderful. In the sitting meditation time during the first period you practice calming, and during the second period you should look deeply to make your day beautiful, the happiest day of your life, and the happiest day for the person next to you and those around you.

"We must bring our boundless love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos. We should let our boundless love permeate the whole universe." Your love can be developed infinitely in different directions. There are some things that can only expand to a certain limit, but your love can expand indefinitely, boundlessly. You should let your boundless love pervade the whole universe, above, below and across." When the other person betrays you, when the other person destroys you, when the other person is cruel to you that will not shake you that will not reduce your love. That is true love. If you can love the person who hates you, if you can love the person who destroys your life, that is the love of a great being. But if you only love those who are very loveable, that is not difficult. That is enjoyable, it is not a real practice of love. If you can love the person who is despicable, that is real love, that is a training.

If a certain person behaves in such a way it is because they have had less chance than you. They may have listened to a talk of Thay, but they have not had other favourable conditions you had in your background. That is the reason why you can love them even if they are not a loveable person.

"Our love will know no obstacle." In order to be able to expand our love like that, we need to practice deep looking. Because without practising deep looking, you cannot love easily. The Buddha said that only love can answer hatred. Because if you answer hatred with hatred, the hatred will increase and will destroy not only yourself and the other person but also the whole universe. So only love can answer hatred. "Our love will know no obstacle. Our heart will be absolutely free from hatred and enmity."

"Whether standing or walking, sitting or lying, as long as we are awake, we should maintain this mindfulness of love in our own heart. This is the noblest way of living." We have to cultivate mindfulness of love the whole daylong. When you walk, it is for love. When you sit, it is for love. When you are lying down, it is for love. When you work, it is for love. When you do everything it is for expressing love, it is motivated by love. When you walk, you sit, you are lying down, you work, all are for expressing your love. When you ask the baby to eat and it doesn't want to, you say: "Please, eat one spoonful for mummy, one spoonful for daddy, one spoonful for your sister." You love yourself, your Sangha body, your spiritual path, your teacher, and that is why every act you do is for expressing love.

The mindfulness of love is the presence of love everywhere, every moment of your days. When you are mindful of your love, you can enter slowly into love concentration. Love concentration is everywhere, and your address, your zip code is love: maitri, karuna, Mudita, and upeksa. Maitri means giving joy, karuna is removing suffering, Mudita is feeling joy and upeksa is loving without discrimination, like the right hand loves the left hand. If you cultivate that concentration all day long: when you walk, when you sit, when you eat, when you work, then you are living in the deep concentration of love. It's called maitri concentration, and you can dwell in maitri concentration all day long. "This is the noblest way of living." And thanks to this you will be "free from wrong views, greed, and sensual desire. And you live in beauty and you realize perfect understanding. That perfect understanding is that you are a Buddha. When you cultivate deep concentration of love you are free from wrong views and you will listen to even the most difficult people very carefully, and try to understand them deeply, their difficulties, their environment, their childhood, and when you do like that, you will arrive at the great understanding that is the perfect understanding of an enlightened one. "Those who practice boundless love will certainly transcend birth and death."

The next chant is: We Are Truly Present. "We are truly present, our heart established in mindfulness." When you spend half an hour chanting you dwell peacefully, mindfully in every word. These words are only words of the wise ones, so your mind and your heart are totally with the wisdom of the words. You have already practiced sitting meditation, walking meditation in the meditation hall, and you have recited the sutra. Kinh hanh is slow walking meditation in the meditation hall. Kinh means weaving, stringing together and every step is like one thread. In the past when we bound the sutra, we used a needle and thread to go through each sheet to keep them together.



So kinh means the thread, which weaves all our steps into oneness. Kinh hanh means using the threads of our conscious breath to go through every one of your steps and bring our steps into oneness. Kinh means taking a thread and putting every sheet together, or all the beads together. When you have a necklace of pearls you need a thread to go through every pearl in order to make a necklace. The thread is kinh. Kinh hanh means you use your mindful breath to go through each of your steps. It's difficult to translate. Kinh hanh means you walk mindfully and slowly in the meditation hall. When you walk one hundred steps, you have one hundred mindful steps. If you walk mindfully then your thread will go through every sheet, but if you walk with your mind on different things in different directions, your thread will be broken and the sheets will go in different directions. So if one of your steps is stepping into the world of suffering, anger, jealousy, that pearl will not go onto your thread to make the beautiful necklace.

"We are truly present, our hearts established in mindfulness for sitting meditation, kinh hanh, and reciting the sutra. May the three jewels and the holy nagas support this meditation center." When you say Namo But Thich Ca Mau Ni or Namo Bo Tat Quan The Am it means you evoke the name of Avalokitesvara or Gautama Buddha, and you see that you walk with the feet of Gautama Buddha or Avalokitesvara.

This is the practice of recollection of the Buddha, evoking the name of the Buddha, or evoking the name of the Dharma or the Sangha. During the time we practice silent kinh hanh, or we practice kinh hanh while evoking the name of the Buddha, we weave our steps with the evocation of the image of the Buddha in us, or the image of being peaceful at every step. We know what the sutra says, but we still recite it again because it is not a matter of obtaining more knowledge but a matter of practicing, training ourselves to live the words of these phrases. We already know these gathas we know every word. But when you recite again, you look deep and you may discover many things that the first recitation does not enable you to see. You have to recite with your deep look. But if your mind goes in ten thousand directions, even if your words are recited beautifully it won't help.

Maybe you have recited that sutra for the last ten years but you haven't understood the meaning. But suddenly one night when you recite the words a great world opens in front of you and you discover many beauties. Every time you recite a sutra like that, it's like a sword that can cut through your ignorance. A sword can cut your ignorance every day. Maybe today you think that this is one recitation like many other recitations. But you never know, your concentration may be deep and suddenly some word of the chanting goes deep into you and you get a deep insight. So you can be enlightened during recitation of the sutra, too.

"May the three jewels", the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha in you. Buddha is also the historical Buddha. Dharma is the methods that help you to transform your habit energy, and Sangha is those around you. The Vietnamese version also mentions the Holy Spirit that helps you, because we believe that when you practice many holy spirits come together with your spirit to make things much better. Good energy attracts good energy. "May the three jewels and the Holy Spirit support this meditation center with its four Sanghas, protect them and support them". I think that the English text has to be translated by Holy Spirit more than Naga. Naga doesn't have any meaning for people. And Naga sometimes means snake. For Indians the holy snake is very beautiful, but for Western friends snake is a very bad sign. So we must translate it as the Holy Spirit. The four Sanghas are the Sangha of monks, the Sangha of nuns, the Sangha of laymen and the Sangha of laywomen.

We may think that there were three different jewels. But in fact the three jewels are one. We cannot divide them. There is the Buddha. But how can we have the Buddha if we don't have the Dharma, the methods to practice in order to make your Buddha become bigger and bigger every day. And how can you make your Buddha become bigger every day without the Sangha? So Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are one.

The Buddha said that there are six domains. The domain of spirit, the domain of attula, that is those who are very angry, the domain of beasts, the domain of hungry ghosts, the domain of those who live in hell, and the domain of humans. So when you recite the sutra you think that you recite for yourself, but maybe there are holy spirits who are coming and listening to you, and also attula and hungry ghosts too. So you have to recite properly, with dignity, with beauty. If you don't recite, don't do it. But if you do recite, do it with beauty, correctly, like you are a human who is reciting for all the six domains. And there are other living beings who come listening to this chanting, please support and protect them. When you read to this point, you must see the presence of six realms that are around us, even though they are not visible to our eyes, they listen to us, observe us and learn with us. If we do something wrong we can hide it from some of our brothers and sisters in the Dharma, but we cannot hide from all the six realms around us who are trying to practice with us too.

"Protect us from the eight misfortunes." The eight misfortunes are situations in which the dharma is not available. The first one is hell. In hell nobody gives you a dharma talk. When you are a hungry ghost, you cannot easily receive the dharma. The third one is the realm of animals. The fourth is the deva realm, where living beings enjoy a lot of sensual pleasures. The fifth is a place very far away, remote, where the Dharma has difficulty to reach. The sixth is to be in a situation of misfortune where you cannot learn the Dharma. For example when you are deaf, when you cannot speak, when you are heavily handicapped, when you are blind, you cannot see the sutras, you cannot see the Dharma in that situation. The seventh is a place where people are very eloquent. There are monks who live peacefully, behave simply, have beautiful behavior, and he are "spiritual teachers" but although they speak eloquently it's very intellectual or like an eloquent lawyer. He can say something that is wrong and make it sound right. Among you there are those who have the seeds of eloquence. Be very careful.

Also there is misfortune like oppression, fire, flooding, and disaster these are un-favorable conditions for a practitioner. It's strange that the fifth accident is humans. Some humans are very naughty and try to prevent you from practicing the beautiful path. And there are those who are not human who also cause difficulties for you. Harmful bacteria, parasites, poisonous insects, small living beings who can kill you, who can cause difficulty to your practice. The eighth one is the government opposing you. And disease too. And the three paths are the three obscure paths: hell, hungry ghost and animal. You have to see that in each of us we have these three paths, and we also have the six realms in us. Don't think that these six kinds of living being are outside of you that the three paths are outside of you. They are in you. Only with mindfulness can you observe and you will transform.

The four objects of gratitude, four things that we feel grateful for are: parents and ancestors, teachers, friends and living beings. In the Vietnamese text it says, "impregnate with divine grace, heavenly grace." The three worlds are the world of desire, the world of form and the world of no-form.

"May there be no place in the world at war. May the winds be favorable, the rains seasonable and the people's hearts at peace. May the practice of the Sangha be steady and diligent, ascending the ten Bhumis without hardship." The ten Bhumis are the ten stages for becoming a bodhisattva. "May the Sangha-kaya live in peace and joy." The Maha-Sangha practices diligently. Maha-Sangha can mean five or six persons, and it means something like noble, great practice. A person who practices to be a bodhisattva has to go through ten Bhumis, ten stages.

The first one is the stage of joy, Mudita. The sign that you are on the way to become a bodhisattva is that you have a lot of joy. Looking at your face, at your behavior, people know that you have a lot of joy. That is one sign that you are a bodhisattva.

The second stage is purity. It means to be far away from all that is impure. All the impurities in your mind and your body are already transformed. When you look at your negative energies and you are able to transform them then you are entering into the second stage of a bodhisattva. You are distanced from the negative energy in you. If you can get away from the negative energies, it is thanks to the practice of the five mindfulness trainings, the fine manners and the precepts.

Then you arrive at the third stage that is emanating light. When you keep the mindfulness trainings properly and your mind is far away from all the negative energies, then you emanate a lot of light, freshness, solidity and freedom. People see that you have a lot of joy. When you see someone who practices mindfulness really beautifully it is as though that person is emanating light.

At the fourth stage your insight, your wisdom starts to be enlightened. Your deep vision, your deep insight starts to be illuminated and it makes all your ignorance, confusion, negative desires, cravings disappear. The Venerable Master Tang Hoi used to say: "Zen means burning all your afflictions."

Now we arrive to the fifth stage, winning against all difficulties. In your path there are always difficulties, but you can transcend all these difficulties, the difficulties, which are inside and those, which are outside. If you have difficulties, you don't care. Some difficulties are caused by your parents, your friends, and the negative situation of your body, your health. You transcend all you overcome all. Every time a difficulty arises, you overcome it.

The sixth stage is dwelling deeply in the present moment, one hundred percent in the present moment. You see the pure land in you and around you, and at the same time you see all the difficulties of life. But you are not shaken by them. You know that is life. You look deeply and gently, you try to overcome and transform it to the best of your ability.

The seventh stage is you go very far in the direction of saving people. After being in practice for a few weeks, we might think, "I know everything, breathing in, breathing out, walking in mindfulness, that I know, that's enough. So I don't need to go far." But we want to go far, we don't feel satisfied with just a bit of learning and practice."

The eighth bhumi is immobility. This means very deep stability. You are very stable; you are not shaken by anything. Even an earthquake will not shake you. Any big afflictions cannot affect you. Any craving, attraction cannot shake you. You arrive at a stage where nothing can shake you: anger, money, temptation of sex or fame, nothing can shake you, nothing can tempt you.

When you arrive at the ninth stage you are totally master of your mind. You act, you speak, you do everything in an effortless, beautiful way. When you open your mouth, it's only beautiful speech, when you act, its only beautiful action. When you do everything, it is always naturally in a beautiful way.

And then you arrive at the tenth stage, the Dharma cloud stage. You are free like a cloud. Wherever you are joyful, you stop. When there are some difficulties, you transform. When something tempts you, you will not be tempted. It's very easy, you become like a cloud, not a normal cloud carried away by the wind, but a Dharma cloud.

"May the Sangha-kaya live in peace, joy and harmony." The word Sangha-kaya is mostly used only in Plum village. The sutras speak a lot about Buddha-kaya and Dharmakaya, but rarely about Sangha-kaya. I believe that Sangha-kaya is the best way to learn how to transcend our egocentricity, our tendency to be so sure of ourselves, and to practice the non-self training. Because if you live with the Sangha you see the wisdom that your sister in the Dharma is yourself, your brother in the Dharma is yourself. You see the lovely sister is yourself, you see the difficult brother is yourself and you practice to live in the Sangha.

You practice so that your Buddha-kaya, your Dharmakaya will be great every day. Kaya means body, Buddha-kaya is the body of the Buddha. Dharmakaya means body of the Dharma. The teaching will be great every day. Sangha-kaya, the body of the Sangha will be great every day. "May the Sangha-kaya live in peace, joy and harmony, the refuges and the precepts bringing happiness and wisdom." We need to live so that our Sangha-kaya will be fresh and new and joyful every day, so that everyone around us can take refuge properly in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha in themselves and practice the precepts properly to bring happiness and wisdom to themselves and those around.

In Buddhism we say that we try to practice two things, punya and prajña. Punya means you practice to obtain merit. And prajña means you practice to gain understanding. When you clean the house for the community, you garden a lot, you wash the dishes, you do a lot of hard work for the Sangha, you do merit work, punya. But if you do that work and are not carried away by your thinking, dwelling peacefully in the present moment one hundred percent, you obtain at the same time great understanding. So when we work or we help the hungry children, we obtain some merit, but if we do that work in order for great understanding to come and embrace everyone then that merit will be very great.

You practice everything with punya and prajña at the same time. When you clean the house, you do it not for cleaning the house but to practice to cultivate your concentration, to live deeply in the present moment, to be deeply present in every act. We call that practicing merit and understanding together. And the more we do it, the greater our merit. So while you are helping the Sangha by cleaning the house, doing the gardening, cutting the wood, shopping, cooking, this is only merit work, and merit work is very little. But if you do it with mindfulness, you live deeply the present moment, you are not carried away by anger, hatred, and dispersion then you practice prajña at the same time. Enlightenment work and merit work must go together and nothing can shake you.

"The wisdom of awakened mind shines like the full moon." We practice so that we will be the mind and body of the Buddha. "The mind of the Buddha is always clear like the full moon. The body of a Buddha is pure like crystal. The Buddha living in the world always tries to save others. Wherever there is the mind of the Buddha there is compassion and love. Namo Shakyamuni Buddha." Our respect to Gautama Buddha. Muni is monk; Sakya is the family name of Gautama Buddha. Shakyamuni is the monk Sakya. If you visit my hermitage, you'll see a bowl made of clay. It was offered to me in India by a monk who also has the family name Sakya. (The bowl is in the Upper Hamlet now.) Ten years ago I visited Lumbini, the place where the Buddha was born and I met with this monk who has the same family name, Sakya, as Gautama Buddha. He appeared and he said: "I heard that you were coming. I've been waiting for you for several days already, to give you this bowl." And he gave me this bowl of clay and a sanghati. I don't know why. I arrived silently; there was no advertisement of my coming to Lumbini at

all. We came like an unknown group of people making a pilgrimage. But when we arrived, that monk said: "I've been waiting for you and I offer you this bowl and this sanghati robe."

When you want to show respect to a Buddha statue or a shrine, according to the tradition in India, when you put your sanghati on you have the right shoulder bare, free and then you walk around the Buddha and you have to go in a clockwise direction with that shoulder facing inward. If you go in the wrong direction they know that you don't know Buddhist tradition. You walk mindfully around the Buddha. According to Vietnamese tradition, you join the palms when you walk in kinh hanh, (slow walking meditation), but in the West you may join your palms if you wish, but it's okay not to. But when you evoke the name of the Buddha or Avalokitesvara, you have to join the palms. We try to do it that way to show our respect. To show your respect is to practice merit, but when you walk mindfully without letting your mind go in ten directions you also practice enlightenment. And merit and enlightenment work must go together.

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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Dharma Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on August 4th, 1996 in Plum Village, France.

# The Five-Fold Steps of Training

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August 4, 1996

Good morning, my friends. Today is the fourth of August, 1996, we are in the Lower Hamlet, and we are going to speak English.

In the past three weeks we have been talking with each other about how to run the twenty-first century, how to climb together the hill of the twenty-first century, with joy and peace and happiness. We already talked about a room in our home so that we can practice restoring our self, restoring peace, joy and communication. We also talked about a little park in our neighborhood so that people in the neighborhood may enjoy walking meditation, sitting together in peace, and so on.

We also have talked about how to maintain peace in school. I think we have to ask schoolteachers how we could have more peace and joy and harmony in school. Not only do we have to ask them, but we have to sit down together, teachers and students, in order to decide how we can make the school a beautiful place in which to live. I know of a number of schools where teachers and students practice being quiet during the first three or five minutes and just enjoy breathing in and out; and every time there is disharmony, there is anger, in school, everyone in the school practices sitting down and breathes in and out peacefully.

I don't think that this is a Buddhist practice alone; it is a practice that everyone likes. I am sure that the Catholics like the practice, the Protestants, the Jews, the Muslims also, because everyone values peace and harmony, and everyone knows that to breathe in and out deeply is very good. Doctors, scientists, nurses: they know very well that breathing quietly, slowly and deeply is very good. When a nurse gives you a shot, she may ask you to breathe in and out peacefully, and while you are preoccupied with breathing in and out, she just gives the shot and you don't feel anything at all; you feel fine.

I know of a school teacher whose name is Henry. He teaches mathematics in a high school in Toronto. He is old-I think he has arrived at the age where he can retire; but the principal of the high school and all the other teachers asked him to stay on because people like his teaching so much. The first time he came to Plum Village for the practice of mindfulness, he confessed that the thing he liked best was to go fishing. When other people could not catch a fish, he did not know why, but he continued to catch fish after fish. That is why he liked it so much. But after staying in Plum Village, he decided that killing fish like that is not a nice thing. These beautiful little animals are swimming very happily in the stream, and suddenly you've caught them, and they die. So he decided to abandon fishing as a hobby, and he thought that, when he went home, he would find other kinds of joys. He found a lot of joys.

But he had some difficulties adjusting the way of life he learned at Plum Village to his environment. The day class resumed, he came in the classroom using walking meditation. He never did that before. He opened the door slowly, he entered slowly, he smiled to the students, and he walked slowly to his desk. And then when he stood up and wiped the blackboard, he did it mindfully, slowly, and all the students were very surprised. They thought that he was sick.

So they asked, "Papa, are you sick?" Because they love him; he's a very excellent mathematics teacher. He was very well known in Vietnam as a mathematics teacher. He wrote many good books on mathematics. He used to get angry with his students. Every time a child couldn't give an answer to his question or showed his stupidity, he would get angry. He might just pick up a piece of chalk and throw it directly to the head of the student. That's the way he had done in the past. And when he corrected math exercises, he might get angry; he might write down, "You are stupid." But still, the students liked him. There is something in him that makes the students like him, that is why they call him "Papa."

"Papa, are you sick?" He smiled and said, "No, I am not sick. I am practicing mindfulness." "What is mindfulness?" He began to explain, "I am wiping out the things on the blackboard, and I do it slowly, I dwell in the present moment, and I enjoy doing that. I don't hurry in order to finish it. I just enjoy every step I make. You see, this morning, I came in, I saw you, I'm very happy. So I just stop and look at you and smile, and that makes me very happy." He spent a few minutes talking about what he had learned in Plum Village. Then he talked with them about the wonders of mindful breathing. He said, "I got a lot of calm when I was in Plum Village, and I want you to try it. Let us sit down; we don't have any bell here, but I will ask a boy to do like this [clap, clap] and then all of us just sit quietly and enjoy breathing in, calming, and breathing out, smiling."

There they went, the boy in the front did like this [clap, clap] and then he and all the rest of the students practiced breathing in and breathing out. He said, "That is excellent. Why don't we do it for two minutes?" And they did it for two minutes. I think the students listen to him and like to try because they have sympathy with him. He proposed that every fifteen minutes there would be a pause of two minutes. Another boy would take a turn to [clap, clap] and then everyone would stop. He would stop lecturing, and everyone would practice breathing and smiling. They don't have a bell, so they just stopped by the sound. After a few months of practice like that, both teachers and students realized that they had made a lot of progress in their studies. The class has grown much more peaceful. And they love it, they continue that practice of breathing, smiling, in the beginning of the class and in the middle of the class. So, they could have three times to breathe in and out and enjoy being together.

Professor Henry reported to me in a letter that other classes learned about that, and they adopted the same kind of breathing in, out, and get three breaks during the hour of mathematics. At one point the whole school knew about the practice, and all of them enjoyed it. And that is why, when our Professor Henry asked for retirement, they said, "No, you have to stay on, you have helped us so much." Now Professor Henry no longer does things like throwing a piece of chalk directly at the head of his students. He told me that one time when he was correcting an exercise, he saw that the student did not understand anything at all. In the past he would write down, "You are stupid," but this time he did not write down that kind of word. He wrote like this: "My dear, you don't understand; that's my fault." A very deep transformation. And the student who received that correction got moved to tears. "It's my fault because I did not try my best to help you understand, that is why you don't understand me." Henry has come back to Plum Village several times for the practice; he's coming for this September retreat. He received the Five Wonderful Precepts many years ago, and finally he was asked to become a Dharma teacher. Those of you who will be back here for September, you will meet him.

So I would like to tell the young people who are here today, you can practice peace at school. The other day I asked you to ask your teacher when there is a conflict between you and someone else and you get irritated or angry, and you don't know what to do to preserve peace and to reconcile. A teacher should know. If she does not know yet, it is her duty to go and learn from someone else. It's very important; you just ask the question, and you make the wheel begin to turn. Yesterday, a mother told me that her daughter did not speak English, so her daughter had asked her to ask me what she can do every time she gets angry: I recommended that they ask their mother first. So if you ask your mother or your father that question, and the answer is not completely satisfying, then they will try harder and next time they will show you not only the theory, but also the practice.

In our hospitals, we've got to have a practice center. I have seen in many big cities, like in Amsterdam, hospitals in which there is a meditation hall, a chapel for the people to sit, to pray, to meditate. This is very important, because the people who are sick need a place to practice, and when their families come, they also need a place to practice. And when a relative undergoes surgery, members of their families, in order to deal with their worries, should be able to practice, and they need a center like that. There should be brothers and sisters who are trained in the art of meditation in order to serve in these hospitals. I think I am going to write a letter to the monks and nuns in Vietnam, and also to the government, about how to set up a meditation hall in every hospital of the country.

And I think that a meditation hall is needed in each school for students and for teachers. I know teachers sometimes suffer very much because of their students and they need to practice, and students also need to practice; therefore, to have a meditation hall or a chapel in school, that is very important. We have the right to ask for that. You know that all spiritual traditions, they would tell you that you need the same kind of thing. It is neither a Buddhist, nor a Christian, nor a Jewish practice, it is just practice; because all of us need peace, restoration, and so on. So in the twenty-first century I'm confident that people, including yourself, will try your best in order to set up meditation halls in schools and in hospitals.

[Bell]

I would ask also for a meditation hall in each city's central park. The park is something like an island of peace. When the people in the city are suffocated, they don't feel well within their body, in their mind, they would think of the park. If they are in the middle of the week, they cannot get out of town, then the park is the answer. That is why you have to take care of the central park. We have to make all the trees and streams of water clear and beautiful; we need silence in the park. And we need a meditation hall without any symbols, whether Buddhist or Catholic or Jewish. We don't need symbols, because it is for everyone. In Bois de Boulogne, Bois de Vincennes, even in the Tivoli park, we need a meditation hall. Of course, in a park we would need ice cream and hot chocolate, but we must have a meditation hall. By the way, I don't like children to eat too many ice creams in Plum Village. I think a child is entitled to have one only each day, that is the maximum.

And I want a meditation hall in the parliament house, in the city hall, because I have seen people debating in the house of parliament. This is war, this is not peace. They hit each other with poisonous arrows of speech. They are angry, they don't have peace at all, and we don't want people without peace to represent us in parliament. Do you? No. If they don't have peace, they don't have harmony within themselves and with the other members of the parliament, then they make decisions that go against our interests. So if you are a writer, if you are an artist, if you are a member of the parliament, if you are a member of the city council, or if you are only a householder, you have to do everything in your power to express your view that you want the person who represents you in the Congress and in the city hall to practice peace. Before you vote for him or for her, look; look carefully to see whether in his or her family, there is harmony or not. This is very important; we have to ask. We have the right to ask whether they have harmony with their partner, their children, because they are public people and they have to make everything transparent.

We should be able to know whether they can use loving speech, whether they can master their anger, whether they can practice somehow looking deeply. Because looking deeply is a matter for everyone, especially for those who have to confront very difficult problems concerning the economy, social conflicts, social injustice, and especially war with another country. If you have no right view within you, if you have no insight within you, you have no harmony, understanding, or compassion, you may declare war with another country and you draw the whole country into war. This is very important.

Therefore, there must be a meditation hall in Congress. It would be beautiful if Congressmen or Senators, before starting a session, would sit together breathing in and out, in peace and make the determination to hold the session in peace and harmony and not just fight each other. This is very important. This is peace education, and who can realize that? You claim to be a democracy, so you have to do it. Citizens have to do it. So when we sit for Dharma discussion, we have to find ways in order to put into practice what we learn from the Five Wonderful Steps of Training.

At the city hall, we need it. Suppose the river that goes through our city is polluted, fish die in that river, who will be responsible? The whole city is responsible; but it is the city council that has to take the matter in hand, so they have to practice looking deeply together at how to save the river. In your home, in your neighborhood, you also organize for looking deeply at your part; and at the city center, city council, they have to practice looking deeply at their part. And we may support them with our insight: "Dear city council, we are in that quarter of the city, we have sat down, we have practiced looking deeply, and this is what we have found out." We can support our city council by the fruit of our practice of looking deeply. The city council, the city hall, has to make decisions based on this insight. If they don't, next time they will not be in the city council. All this is practice, and we practice as a Sangha and not as individuals.

How about places like l'Elysee or the White House, where the president and the government meet to make decisions? How about the military headquarters? I think it is like in our home: there should be a place of peace for the president, for his ministers, to sit in, to breathe together, to calm themselves, before they look into the urgent matters of the nation. And you have the right to request that. You have to speak out your aspiration, after having practiced looking deeply. We don't ask them to follow any particular religion; we just ask them to have a little bit more peace and calm and understanding and harmony within themselves, and we are ready to support them. We will write letters without anger, we will practice talking to them with loving kindness; but we have to do nonviolent action. Loving action has to be taken by us every day.

Decision-making is too important to leave to them alone; you have to take in hand your own fate, and therefore I want the children to hear this, because the twenty-first century is theirs. We adults are very sorry not to have been able to do it during the twentieth century, so we

hope that in the twenty-first century you will be able to do that. We are already a little bit enlightened on the matter; we have suffered so much, and we have made you suffer. So we will be supporting you wholeheartedly, and many of us will be climbing with you the hill of the twenty-first century. Please, the people who are less young, also have Dharma discussions on this and make known your insight, your decisions. Now, the young people, when they hear the small bell, they would stand up and bow to the Sangha before they go out to continue their studies and practice.

Dear friends, the Buddhadharma is described as something that you can come and see by yourself. You don't have to believe something through another person, even the clergy, the priest, the mediator. The ultimate dimension of reality is something you can touch, you can see by yourself. And you can do it now, and here; it's not a problem of time. It's not a promise. In the method of Buddhism as I see it, it's very concrete; there's no place to speculate, to suppose, to create an hypothesis. When the Buddha set out to teach and to help people, the first thing he asked people is to look directly into their suffering. Suffering is not an abstract thing; suffering is there, very real. Suffering is one of the basic truths called holy truths, the Noble Truths. Suffering is a holy truth. Why?

In Vietnamese we call it thanh de, the holy truth. The word that the Buddha used is dukkha; dukkha means ill-being, pain, suffering, translated by Chinese kou. This word, kou, originally in Chinese means bitter, the opposite of sweet. It makes you suffer. And you have to look at it. Why is suffering a holy truth? Because, without suffering, you have no way out. The first thing you have to do is to look, and look deeply, into the nature of your suffering. If you cannot do that, if you try to run away from it, there's no way that you can transform your suffering. That is why suffering is the basic truth and a holy truth. It means we have to learn from our suffering. We have to understand our suffering. If we don't know anything about our suffering, if we cannot learn anything about our suffering, suffering is no longer a holy truth. Holy or not holy: it depends on our way of handling suffering. And the Buddha said suffering is absolutely necessary for you to find a way out.

A Zen teacher in Vietnam during the 13th century urged his students to practice diligently in order to get out of the world of birth and death. And a student asked him, "Teacher, please show us how to get out of the world of birth and death." And he said, "You have to look for the world of no birth and no death." Then the student asked, "But where can we find the world of no birth and no death?" And the teacher said, "You look for it right in the world of birth and death." It means, out of suffering you will find the way of transcending the suffering. It sounds like something contradictory, but it is the basic Buddhist teaching. So looking into the nature of suffering, you can see many, many things that you need to know.

How that suffering has come to be, that is the second truth. That is about the nature of your suffering. If you already see the nature of your suffering, how it has come to be, you are already on your way to liberation. That is a sentence uttered by the Buddha. Dear friends, if you look into the nature of your suffering, and if you see already what kind of nutriment that has brought about that suffering, you are already on the path of liberation; because everything needs food to grow, to be there, including your suffering. So if you look into your suffering, and if you can see how that has come to be, what kind of food you have fed it so that it is now there as a hard fact, then you are already on the way of liberation, because you have already seen a path of liberation. So the nature of your suffering is the cause of your suffering, the nutriment, the food that you have used in order to feed your suffering.

For instance, if you suffer from a depression now, your depression is dukkha, suffering. So you look into your depression; you need your depression in order to understand your depression. You should not try to run away from it. Go back; confront your depression; embrace it and look deeply into it, and you'll find out after a few days of practice that in the past few months or few years, you have lived in such a way that made depression possible now. Because your depression cannot come just like that, without any cause. You have got the nutrition, the nutriment, the food that has brought about the depression. What you have eaten, what you have drunk, what you have listened to, what you have viewed, what you have touched, are the kind of nutriment that have made up your depression now. So if you know the nature of your depression, you also know how to stop feeding your depression. And you use other kinds of nutriment for yourself, and a few months later, your depression will be gone.

Suppose the person you love just betrayed you and goes with another person. In the beginning you had hope that he and you would live a long life together, sharing everything, and he or she has made the solemn promise to live together until your hair becomes white, until all your teeth come out. But now, he just abandoned you and followed a young woman. You feel the victim of injustice. You cannot just accept that. You cannot accept the betrayal. You want him, you want her to be faithful.



Your suffering is there, and we advise you to embrace your suffering and look deeply into it and look into how that kind of betrayal has come to be. Who is responsible? What kind of nutriment has made it possible? That is the Buddhist way. You are advised to do it by yourself, if possible with the help of other brothers and sisters in the Dharma. They can do it with you. They can join their mindfulness and the practice of deep looking with you, and help you to discover the nature, the cause of your suffering. If I sit with you, if I practice with you, I may find out that you have been somehow responsible for his act of betrayal.

In the Buddhist teaching, we learn that we have all kinds of seeds within our consciousness. This is our consciousness; it is made up of two levels, at least. The deeper level is called store consciousness. In Buddhist psychology, we speak of consciousness in terms of seeds, les semences. The Sanskrit word is bija. We learn that in the store consciousness, we have all kinds of seeds within here. Seeds of compassion, mindfulness, tolerance, endurance, peace, joy, loving kindness. We have all the good seeds in us. And the Buddha is also there as a seed, the seed of Buddhahood, the seed of enlightenment, the seed of concentration, the seed of loving kindness, the seed of mindfulness. It is a fact, and not just a dogma, that you have the Buddha nature in you. You can touch it, you can make a demonstration, you can verify it. Because, according to this practice, mindfulness is the Buddha and loving kindness is the Buddha; understanding is the Buddha; and all of us have the potential of being mindful, of being understanding, of being compassionate.

Children have proved that at times they can be compassionate, mindful, understanding; and adults also. That is the Buddha nature in us. When I ask you to drink your glass of water mindfully, you can do it, you can drink your water mindfully. That means mindfulness is possible for you; you have a seed of mindfulness within your store consciousness. That is why you can practice, and you can be successful in drinking your water mindfully, or in walking mindfully. That is a demonstration that Buddha is in you, because mindfulness is very often described as the energy of a Buddha. A Buddha, a real Buddha, is made with that kind of energy. You have it. You don't need to believe, because you already have direct knowledge about it. It's not exactly a religious belief; this is just an experience.

But in your store consciousness there are other, negative, seeds, like the seed of ignorance, the seed of forgetfulness which is the opposite of mindfulness. Strange, you have the seed of mindfulness and you have the opposite kind of seed. Mara is the equivalent of Satan. If you want to invite the Buddha, you can. If you want to invite Satan to come up, he will be glad to come up. And Buddha and Mara both are of an organic nature. That is the teaching of the Buddha. Buddha and Mara, mindfulness and forgetfulness, both of them are organic substance because they can deteriorate. It's like a flower and garbage. A flower can become the piece of garbage. The piece of garbage, if you know how to do it, will be transformed back into the flower. Mindfulness and forgetfulness play the role of flower and garbage in us, also Buddha and Mara, because we are a living reality; we are not a piece of inert matter in a museum of life. We are a living thing, therefore everything in us is alive, including Buddha and Mara. How wonderful: Buddha is alive in us, not a notion, a concept.

And you have that seed of jealousy in you. You have also the seed of betrayal in you. All of us are able to betray the people we love, not only he, but you. All of us have the seed of loyalty, all of us have the seed of betrayal. If you have not betrayed him, it is because the seed of betrayal in you has not been watered by yourself and by the people who live around you. But if you allow your seed of betrayal to be watered today, tomorrow, by yourself and by the people around you, one day you will betray him, you will betray her. That's something sure.

Now, practice looking deeply to see, what have you done in the past? Have you allowed the seed of betrayal in him to be watered? Who has watered that seed? Did you water that seed yourself? Have you made an effort to remain fresh and loving? If you have not made any effort to remain fresh and pleasant, then you yourself have contributed to the watering of the seed of betrayal. People usually love what is lovable. If you have stopped being lovable, then you help the other way. Have you been very mindful in taking care of him? Have you allowed a situation to happen in which his seed of betrayal has been able to be watered every day? Outside of your mindfulness you have allowed everything to take place, and now you blame him, blame that person for your suffering.

Maybe the suffering, the cause of the suffering comes from yourself, mostly. You just think that you are a victim of injustice, all the suffering that you have now has come from the other person. You blame him or her entirely, and that is injustice on your part because you don't see the truth. You don't know how to handle your suffering, you don't know how to look into that holy truth, suffering, in order to see the real nature of that suffering. The first truth is holy, that is suffering. The second truth is holy also, that is the nature of your suffering. You need mindfulness, you need looking deeply, you need concentration in order to find out that holy truth.

The third truth is that your suffering can be healed, can be transformed. Because it is not a hope, it is a fact that if something has come, it can go away. If you used some kind of nutriment to bring up something, now if you don't want that something to stay, you just cut the nutriment. That is the simple truth, the truth of the absence of suffering. Suffering can be transformed, that is the third holy truth. It's rather comforting. There are people who say Buddhism is a little bit too pessimistic, they always begin with talking about suffering. But that is not pessimism; that is realism, realistic. Because when you peer into the truth of suffering, you see not only the second noble holy truth, but also the third noble truth, which is the possibility of removing the suffering. That's rather good news. You are confident that with some practice, you can end the suffering, you can bring back the state of well-being to you, and to the people around you. Because the first truth is the presence of ill-being, the third truth is the absence of ill-being, which means at the same time the presence of well-being. That's nirvana; nirvana is the extinction of suffering and of all the nutriments that have brought suffering to you. Is it too late or not? It's never too late.

## Part II

Suffering is still going on if you don't practice, or if the other person doesn't practice. So now, if you want to take the initiative, you don't demand anything, you don't require any preconditions, you just begin to stop feeding your suffering. You do it with your faith in the third noble truth, holy truth. "I have to stop feeding my pain, my suffering." And that kind of conviction, that kind of attitude can already bring you a lot of comfort. Then we learn that we have to practice expanding our heart. We should be able to realize many conditions of our happiness and peace. We should have several roots. The other day when I talked to the young people, I told them that if we are mindful, we can be aware of many things, many elements in us and around us that can make us happy. Don't commit yourself to just one idea of happiness.

There was a layman who was asked to give a Dharma talk to monks and nuns because he was so well versed in Buddhism. That happened in the 1930's in Hue. It was to him a very great joy to be able to help the monks and the nuns with his knowledge and understanding of the sutra. I think he was teaching the Surangama Sutra. Before coming to the chair to teach, he touched the earth three times before his students. One day, as he was walking up the hill to go to the temple to give his instructions on the Surangama, he saw two young boys on the sidewalk enjoying a chess game. He also enjoyed playing, so he wanted to take a few minutes to sit with the little boys, and he enjoyed it so much that he almost forgot that he had to go to the temple and give the Dharma talk. Another friend of his, coming by, saw him like that. He said, "Dear friend, do you know what time it is now? Let us go!" And then he climbed the hill with the other person.

His name is Tam Minh, Clarity of the Heart. He had the capacity of being happy with whatever was there around him and in him. To give a Dharma talk to the monks and nuns was a joy, but to sit down with children was also a joy. And not only that; everything around him could make him happy. So we should not commit ourselves to just one thing. We should not ruin our life just because of one thing. A French poet said, "Un seul être me manque, et tout est dépeuplé," "Only one person is not there, and I see the whole world as empty." Why? Why behave like that? Because there are many living beings around; why look upon them as nonexistent? How could that being be there if all of us were not there?

So look deeply into the nature of your suffering and practice loving kindness, practice understanding, so that you will not continue to blame. You see your responsibility, you see your way of salvation, of liberation, you are able to touch many wonders of life that are available to you in the here and the now, and suddenly you become the most attractive person, very refreshing, very healing. And everyone will go back to you, because we need you. If you are fresh, happy, peaceful like that, every one of us will need you, will look in your direction, they would follow you, especially those of us who are suffering a lot.

The first holy truth is dukkha, suffering; the second truth is the nature of our suffering, samut kaya and the cause of our suffering, the n. . . [GAP -- end of side two of latest tape]

The third truth is the possibility of removing the suffering, Narodha. The absence, the taking away of suffering, which means at the same time the presence of well-being. The fourth truth is Marga, the way, the way of practice, the dharma. How not to continue to feed your suffering; how to offer yourself the opposite kind of nutriments; that is, the dharma. The Five Steps of Training are really the way. The way as presented by our teacher, the Buddha, is

the Eightfold Noble Path. Right understanding, right speech, right thinking, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. If you practice the Five Steps of Training, you practice the Eightfold Noble Path in a very concrete way. If you put all your being into the practice, if you abide by the practice of mindfulness of consuming, of speaking, of listening, then that is the suppression of the suffering because you don't allow the nutriment for suffering to continue any more.

The other day, we were speaking about the First, the Second, and the Third Steps of Training: to protect life, to practice giving, social justice, and to preserve the integrity of couples and families and protect children from sexual abuse. All these things are right action, right view, right efforts. The moment when you undertake to practice these precepts, trainings, you already begin to get relief. I will offer you an example. There was a Vietnam war veteran who came and participated in a retreat offered by us to about thirty or forty former soldiers, army officers, who had fought in Vietnam, together with twenty or thirty other people, including psychotherapists and family members and so on. I remember we had to practice listening deeply every day and with a lot of patience in order to allow a situation where the veterans can speak out. It's very difficult, because many of them were caught in their own suffering, it's very hard for them to touch their suffering, and to talk about it. Sometimes I had to sit there for half an hour not saying anything, just breathing and smiling, and show our compassion, our readiness to listen. Yet no one could speak a word. And we begin again.

There was a war veteran who tried to join us in walking meditation, but he was so fearful. During the war he had learned that you can get into an ambush very easily, and there were many Vietnamese there. A Buddhist monk can be a guerrilla in disguise. So he was scared to death. He tried to join others for walking meditation, but he kept a very big distance; he walked behind us about thirty meters. He thought that if anything happened, he would have time to run for cover. Instead of staying in the dormitory with us, he camped in the forest and he set traps around his tent. That was our first retreat organized for war veterans in America.

One of the retreatants finally told us his story, that had never been told before. During a battle in Vietnam, most of his friends were killed in an operation, and he saw his companions die. So he got very angry. He wanted to retaliate. He brought out a number of sandwiches, he put explosives inside the sandwiches, he left them on the place where children would play, and he hid himself and watched. He saw children coming. They were very happy to see this kind of sandwich, and ate them. And just ten or fifteen minutes later, they began to scream, and their mothers came out, trying to get them to the hospital, but the American soldier knew that nothing could be done in order to help the children. He had wanted to do so out of his anger and the will to retaliate. Since the time he went back to America, he could not live with that kind of image in his store consciousness. He told us that every time he found himself together with a few children in a room, he had to run out of that room as quickly as possible. He just couldn't bear it, for more than twelve years. His mother encouraged him to deal with the present time, to forget the war, the war was over; but for him, the war was never over. Until he came to the retreat.

I told him, "Yes, I know that you have killed children. You have ambushed them as your way to retaliate. I know you have caused suffering. But I want you to know also that there are many children who are dying around the world, everywhere. Many die just because they need just one medicine pill. Many children die because they need a glass of milk, soy milk. Many step on grenades and bombs that are left over there. If you know how to use your time, now, you can save many of them, even every day. You have the capacity of acting, of living in mindfulness, in compassion, and I know you will be able to save the lives of many children, now. Why don't you make a determination to receive the First Precept of not killing, of protecting life? You receive that precept in the presence of the whole Sangha.

"And you take action right away. You go out and you save children who are dying in the present moment, children even in America. In America there are children who are dying every day because of stupid causes. Children in Southeast Asia, in Africa, everywhere. You know that you have an American passport. You can go almost everywhere, not like the boat people. The boat people, because they don't have a piece of paper, they are thrown back to the sea and die; but you, you are different. You are an American citizen. You can go where you want, and you can help many children from dying. So make the determination. Receive the First Precept, and act." And the teaching was already a drop of Dharma nectar. When a drop of Dharma nectar fell into his heart, it opened. He was transformed right away, in that moment. And he made the determination to receive the First Precept and to go out and help.

Suddenly, you become a bodhisattva with a lot of energy within you, and that is exactly the kind of energy that you need to heal. Why remain immobilized, paralyzed in your suffering? Why continue to be the victim of your sorrow? The Five Steps of Training can open up the door for you to transform your life, to transform the lives of living beings on Earth. Because that is the way of loving, protecting, and offering joy and peace. This is not an idea, this is not a dogma, this is not a promise. The Buddhadharma is something you can come and see

by yourself, and touch by yourself. The healing can take place right away, the moment when you embrace the Dharma.

A writer, a woman writer with a lot of talent, she came to me and confessed that she was abused as a little girl and she has carried that kind of suffering within her. She doesn't feel that she's a normal person. I helped her to practice. I said, "Sit down and practice looking with me. Are you angry at that person? Don't you think that he was sick? It was only sick people who do that kind of thing to children and ruin their life. Do you see the suffering in that person, how that person has been brought up? There are many of them like that to be helped. You know, you are a writer. You can help these people. You can do more; you can help the children who are about to be molested by these people. You have the energy, the talent that you need.

"You have to make the vow, the determination to receive the Third Precept: I am aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct in family circles. I have seen children molested and suffer for their whole life, and I now undertake to practice the Third Precept in order to protect the integrity of families, individuals, and children. I am determined to learn ways to do that with my Sangha, because I know that if I continue to recite the Five Steps of Training, to hold Dharma discussions with my Sangha, and learn better ways to practice them, then I will be able to help." During a Precepts transmission ceremony, the Sangha is there with their best presence and they witness to the fact that you are undertaking the path. During that moment, transformation takes place already, because you receive a lot of energy the moment you decide to receive and practice the Steps of Training.

[Bell]

The healing takes place very quickly, and you put your heart into the practice. Concerning the Fourth Precept, we see that it is the art of deep listening and loving speech. We know that a lot of suffering has been created by our lack of capacity to listen deeply and with compassion to the other person. If there is no communication possible between you and her or him, that's because you don't practice; you are not able to listen with calm, with compassion. Avalokiteshvara is the one who shows the talent of listening deeply with compassion. When we evoke the name of Avalokiteshvara, we must be determined to learn his way of deep listening, compassionate listening.

In order to be able to listen with calm and compassion, we should train ourselves in the art of mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful sitting, so that every time we hear things that shock our ears, that are provocative, that go against our common sense, we will not get irritated. Because the moment we show our irritation at the anger, the other person will stop talking. So we have to listen in such a way that encourages the other person to continue to talk, because it's very healing for him or for her. You are the best therapist if you know the art of compassionate listening. You listen because you have compassion; you want to relieve him or her of the suffering and not because you want to listen in order to analyze, or judge, or condemn, or correct.

Compassionate listening is just to give the other person a chance to empty what is in their heart. Because he has had no one to listen to him, he has become more and more like a bomb, ready to explode; she also. So you are afraid of him, of her, you don't want to approach, because you are afraid of the explosion. And as you try to avoid him or her, they think that we despise them, we want to boycott them and the suffering will increase. So the only alternative is to train ourselves in the art of deep listening, compassionate listening, and go to him or her to help. If you cannot do that, who in the world can? Because you may be the closest person to him or to her. So the Fourth Step of Training is about deep listening and using loving speech.

How to practice that? Sit quietly, and maintain your mindful breathing, and nourish your compassion. Remind yourself that you are listening in order to relieve him or her of the suffering and not for anything else. Then when the other person says things that are wrong, incorrect, full of injustice, misunderstanding, you can continue to listen with serenity. That is the act of Avalokiteshvara. Many of us are able to do that after some time of practice and that is very healing. If at some point you feel that your capacity of listening has come to a limit, you cannot go on for another five minutes, so you have to bow and say "Darling, could we continue later on? I need to do something right now, I would love to continue to listen." Don't try too hard; because you should know your limit. I also practice that. I learn about my limits. I know that I should not try to do more than I can.

This is one thing I repeat over and over again to the people who attend retreats on helping

professions: nurses and doctors and psychotherapists, social workers and so on. Because they see suffering a little bit too much, and they try too hard and they get burnt out very quickly. So you practice more, get refreshed, and then you offer another session of compassionate listening. If you are to explain to him or her about his or her misunderstanding, about your own suffering, then you should, we should, be able to use loving speech. We can tell the truth, but in such a way that the other person can see, can understand. We speak not for expressing our anger, just trying to help the other person to see. And that is why calm, serenity, and loving kindness should be there while we speak. Every time we feel some irritation coming up, we cannot swallow our suffering, and then we should stop. We should ask for another chance to do it; don't continue. We should know our limit.

That is about the Fourth Step of Training, the only kind of practice that can restore communication. That is something we have to practice as individuals, as partners, father and son, mother and daughter; and we have to practice as nation with nation, because our nation suffers, yes. But the other nation also suffers. We have to recognize that. We should not believe that we are the only nation that suffers. The other nation may be suffering at the same time, and on our part there may be misunderstanding, so we continue to blame each other and kill each other. The warring parties always do that.

If there is another nation that can come in and help, that's wonderful. But helping here does not mean to take sides, but to help both sides to calm down, to be able to tell the other side of the suffering in this side. Loving speech and deep listening should be applied between nations. That is why at the United Nations you also need the practice of listening. At peace talks, we do need that kind of discipline; and that is something, I hope, that will be possible to start in the twenty-first century.

Concerning the Fifth Precept, the Fifth Step of Training: Mindful consumption is the key word. Because you consume many things: food, drink, conversations, relationships, television, magazines, the so-called controlled items. Many of the items we consume contain toxins that bring war into our body and bring war into our consciousness, and water the negative seeds in us. There are so many kinds of food. Edible food ([ph: duan tuc]) is the first category of food. The second kind of food is [ph: sup tuc]: sense impressions. We open our eyes, our ear, our nose, our tongue, our body, our mind, to many kinds of foods. The sound, the image, the ideas, the touch, that we consume in our daily life can bring to us a lot of poisons and toxins. The Buddha said, suppose there is a cow that is seriously sick with a skin disease. [End of side three]

[gap in tape]

[Beginning of side four]

... suck the blood. If we bring the cow down to the water, tiny living beings in the water will come and cling to the cow and suck the blood. If you bring the cow close to a [circular?] tree, all the beings living in the bark of the tree will come out and stick to the cow to suck the blood. We human beings, we are like that in our daily life; we open wide our eyes, our nose, our tongue, our body, our mind, to that kind of touching. You just drive through the city, and all the things you see in the city -- the announcements, the commercials -- all these things become nutriments to your eyes, your ears. When you read, when you watch television, you are consuming. And you are very, very vulnerable, like the cow without skin. So poison just penetrates you like that, and you allow yourself to be poisoned like that in your daily life, and then you get the sickness, the suffering. So Mindfulness of consumption is the only way to protect yourself from ingesting poisons every day. Practice and protect yourself and protect your children from that kind of unmindful consumption. That is the Fifth Precept, very important. How could you get rid of your depression if you don't practice the Fifth Step of Training?

The Five Steps of Training are to be studied more deeply by Dharma discussions, so that we may learn better ways of practicing mindfulness: mindfulness of speech, mindfulness of listening, mindfulness of consumption, mindfulness of protecting life, and so on. Who is the author of the Five Steps of Training? Who has created them? It's you yourself. It is our mindfulness that has brought about the insight of the Five Steps of Training. The Buddha was one of the people who have contributed to the art of mindful living. He proposed the Five Precepts, yes. But since that time, many generations have come and practiced, and contributed their insight in the practice. The Five Steps of Training as presented to you today are the fruit of many generations' practice. If during your practice you find out other things, you have insight that can improve the way to present the Five Steps of Training, to modify the wording, then you are among the coauthors of the Five Steps of Training. This is not something imposed on us by a deity, by a god. This is a collective product of those who

practice mindfulness, and out of their insight, they see the path, they see the Fourth Truth, the Truth about the path of liberation.

For those of us who have practiced the Five Steps of Training, we see it as the way for the world to get out of these difficult situations. The Five Steps of Training are also instruments for dialogue with people of other spiritual traditions. This is the way we adopt so that a future would be possible for our children and their children. Have you tried something similar like this? What do you have to tell us, to help us to improve our practice? That is why during the conference organized by Gorbachev in San Francisco, the State of the World Forum, I did not talk much about other things. I just talked about mindful living and the Five Wonderful Precepts.

So all of you who have received the Five Steps of Training, learned the art of mindful living, I hope that you have the opportunity to deepen your understanding of these Steps of Training. I hope that you will continue to have a Sangha where you are, so that you can continue to explore, to deepen your understanding. Then you'll be able to share them with many people around you, so that we have a future for our children and their children for the twenty-first century, and don't repeat the same kind of errors and mistakes that we have made during this twentieth century.

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the interbeing nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# The Nature of Self

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Good morning, my dear friends, my dear Sangha. Today is the 21<sup>st</sup> of July, 1998, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. I would like to tell you the story of Blanche. Her Vietnamese name is To, which means "white," and today we call her Blanche. Blanche was a little blind girl who lived with her father and her mother in a little house, at the foot of a mountain where there was a large forest. Her father was a very loving father, and he had made her a flute from bamboo. Blanche played the flute very well. She was a very talented young girl, and she had discovered how to play the flute by herself. Before she was blind, she did not play every day, but after she became blind she would go to the forest and play every afternoon.

Blanche was blind because of a chemical that was sprayed on the mountains and the forests in Vietnam, during the war. Guerrillas hid themselves in the jungle and on the mountains, and the pilots could not see them; therefore they flew airplanes over the mountains and the jungle to spray the forest with Agent Orange. After a week all the leaves would fall, and the trees become bare, then the movement of troops could be seen from an airplane, in order to bomb and kill the enemies. And one day when Blanche was playing her flute in the forest, an airplane came and sprayed the chemical, and it fell on her, and that is how she became blind.

One day she heard that her father died as a soldier in a battle. She could not believe it. How could a person die? She didn't know what death was, except that one day she had seen a little bird dead, close to her house, and no matter what she had done the little bird could not be revived. She was not going to see her father again, because her father was like the dead bird. So she lived only with her mother. When she heard that her father had died, she was very sad; and that was why she played the flute every day, in order to relieve her sorrow. She was crying, and telling every one, every tree, every cloud, every insect in the forest of her pain and her suffering, and that is how she got relief. Playing flute was her every day practice to gain more peace, more calm and so on. No one could help her, except the flute. Her mother had to cut wood, and transport it to the nearby market to sell, so that she could buy the things she needed. Blanche used to accompany her to the market, pulling the wooden cart, so that her mother wouldn't have to push too hard. After she became blind, she was still able to help her, and she went with her mother to the market to sell wood. Her mother always bought something in the market for her to eat before they went home, a cake wrapped in banana leaves, or something like that.

One day when Blanche was playing the flute in the forest, she heard someone approaching. She stopped playing, and asked, "Who's there?" There was no answer, and

she asked again, "Who's there? What is your name?" There was still no answer, but she knew that there was some one very close to her. Finally, she heard someone walking close to her, and then someone began to speak in a very funny way—it seemed that that someone did not know how to speak. "My...my...my name is...Peter." It was a little boy about eleven or twelve. His Vietnamese name is Thach Lang; translated into English, that is "Stone Boy," and that is why I use the name Peter, because Peter or Pierre also means "stone boy."

"Where did you come from? How old are you?" She kept asking him that question. When she had heard a few words from Peter she knew already that this was a young person, a boy. Although she could not see, her way of listening was wonderful and she could already visualize the young man. He was very silent. He tried to say something, but it seemed as though he did not know how to speak the human language. Finally he could say that his name was Peter, and that he came from the top of a mountain very far away. That is all the information she got. She said, "Come over here," with a lot of authority. So Peter came, and Blanche used her ten fingers in order to explore his face. She smiled. "I was right, you are twelve years old, and your face is in the shape of a mango." In fact, his face was in the shape of a mango. They became friends very quickly. Amazingly, during one hour of sitting and chatting together, he learned a lot of words, and they began to speak to each other. He began to tell her what was around them, the kinds of trees, and the colors of the trees, the colors of the leaves, the colors of the trunks. At that time the trees were beginning to grow new leaves.

Blanche invited Peter to her home, and they were given dinner by her mother. This was the first time that Blanche had had a guest in her house, and this boy was a wonderful boy. He did not say much, and it was very difficult to get information about where he had come from, who his father and mother were. Blanche's mother was very careful, because she did not want to touch the seed of suffering in anyone—maybe the father of the boy had already died in battle, maybe his mother was sick—so she was very careful not to ask too many questions. Blanche also learned the way of her mother, and she stopped asking questions. But they continued to talk, and after dinner they went out and played near the brook, and she asked him to tell her what he saw around him. Because of that exercise he continued to learn how to say things.

Peter stayed many days in that home, and became a real brother to Blanche. They were very happy as friends, and he learned to call the mother of Blanche "Mommy." So the two children helped Blanche's mother to put the logs on the cart, and they helped her to pull and to push the cart to the market. During the trip Peter continued to describe to Blanche everything that he saw around. At one time she said, "Peter, you are my eyes. With you around I am no longer blind. It is wonderful to have you with me. Don't leave me, because as long as you are close to me, I don't have the impression that I'm a blind girl any more. " She was very happy.

But something awful happened during that day. There was fighting breaking out in the market, there was bombing, there was shooting, there was burning of the houses, and the two children lost their mother. She was going to a shop to buy some kerosene for the lamp, but because of the fighting she got lost. And they did not know whether she died or whether she was kidnapped by someone. After waiting and waiting until the sun was about to set, they decided to go home and take refuge in their home. They cried a lot,



especially Blanche, and on day Peter proposed that they set out on a journey to find the mother who had been lost. Both of them believed very strongly that if they could find the mother, then everything would be fine again. Remember, that is what they believed: if we are able to find our mother again, then everything will be alright again—there will be no war, there will no fighting, there will be no chemical poisons, and everything will be fine again. That was their strong belief. Blanche believed that when her mother gave her birth, that she also gave birth to the mountains and rivers around her, and the birds, the fish, the streams, and everything. She believed her mother to be someone who could create her and create the cosmos around her, and that if something was wrong; it was because they had lost their mother. If they were able to find their mother again, then everything will be fine again. So the purpose of the two children was to find Mother. I think all us believe the same thing, we are still trying to find our mother.

(Bell)

I know something about Peter. That day, sitting on the top of the mountain, he heard the sound of the flute. Someone was playing the flute down there, at the foot of the mountain, and the sound of the flute was wonderful. The music spoke a lot to him, and suddenly he was born. Alone, he tried to find his way down from the top of the mountain to see who was playing the flute, and finally he discovered Blanche, sitting at the foot of a tree and playing. That afternoon they met each other and became friends, became something like brother and sister to each other. Blanche had the talent of playing the flute, and Peter had the talent of singing. We don't know how he learned to sing like that, so that every time he sang he was able to make the sky and the earth quiet. He could even make the fighting quiet. He just sat down very quietly with solidity and freedom, and raised his voice to sing. A storm could be dissipated by his singing. While he was singing, many birds would come from many directions and circle around, over his head. That happened always, every time Peter started singing.

During the battle when the children lost their mother, it was awful—they heard the cry of children and adults dying or being wounded, they heard the sounds of the houses burning, they heard the shouting, the fighting--and suddenly Peter sat up. It is very dangerous to sit up or stand up during a bombing, because the bombs could kill you. The safest way is to lie down flat every time there is shooting or bombing going on. All the children in Vietnam knew that: every time there was fighting and shooting you had to get flat. Blanche was very used to that, and she pulled Peter down and got him to lie very still. But at one point Peter would not obey her any more, because it was very oppressive—the war, the fighting, the crying, the shouting—that is why he sat up and began to sing. And as his voice rose like that, suddenly there was a transformation in the air, and the storm of the battle seemed to die, and a lot of birds came and circled around their heads, and finally the fighting died down and the soldiers left. The people in the village began to come out and help the people who were wounded in the fighting and bombing. Now, Blanche was able to sit up, and both children began to inquire about their mother, only to find that she was not there. They spent many hours looking and asking neighbors, but no one saw her, and so they went home. A number of days later they decided to go on a long, long trip to look for their mother. Don't think this is someone else's story, because this is my story, and it is your story also. All of us are trying to find our real mother, our common mother.

Blanche and Peter went through many dangers. This story is very long, and this morning I am only telling you some of it. Both children got arrested, because the police suspected them of being "liaison children," children who could bring information to the guerrillas. So they were both arrested, and Blanche was put into a school for blind children. After some months in prison, Peter was sent to a school of young army officers, a school for boys whose fathers had already died in battle. Peter was brought to that school, and he had to follow the military discipline, like all the other boys. You know, Blanche and Peter were both artists, and so they suffered very much from that kind of discipline, and they were separated.

One day Peter talked to his friends in the school, and he described the suffering that the children in the country were experiencing. They came together and decided to ask their teachers and the administration of the school, instead of teaching fighting, to teach the children the way to love each other, the way to bring peace and harmony into the school and into society. They dared to come to the teachers and the members of the school administration and to ask them not to teach them how to kill, how to fire guns any more, but teach them something that is more helpful. Because of that action they were arrested, they were not allowed to be students in the school any more, and Peter was locked into the prison with other prisoners, although he was only twelve or thirteen years old.

In prison, Peter met a very strange monk. That monk was in prison too, because he was trying to do something for peace. His name is funny--his name is "the Coconut Monk." I personally have met the Coconut Monk. When he was a young man he went to France and studied engineering, but when he went back to Vietnam, he did not like being an engineer anymore. He wanted to become a monk, and he practiced a lot of sitting meditation. He liked to sit where the atmosphere was calm and fresh, so he climbed up in a coconut tree and built a platform up there, and he sat in meditation up there. That is why people called him the Coconut Monk. I think the son of the American writer John Steinbeck also went to Vietnam, and he had the chance to spend a few months living with the Coconut Monk.

I knew the Coconut Monk. He was doing something that people considered crazy, but he was a real, good monk. He tried to stop the war in his own way. He went to collect pieces of bombs and bullets, and he melted them to make a mindfulness bell. Every night he would invite the bell to sound, and he would chant the name of the Buddha and Avalokitesvara. He told the pieces of metal that he collected, "You have been playing the game of war. Now I would like to help you practice. I am going to transform you into a bell of mindfulness, so that you become enlightened and become a bodhisattva trying to enlighten the people in this country who are sleepy, with brothers fighting and killing each other in a very stupid way." He asked friends to come every night, and he invited the bell to sound, as everyone was breathing in and out and transforming themselves into peaceful people, and not fighters anymore.

One day he went to the Presidential Palace, and he wanted to have an interview with the President of South Vietnam. With him he had a wooden house, with a cat and mouse living inside together. I don't know how he educated the cat and the mouse, but they co-existed. He gave the mouse things to eat, and the cat things to eat, and neither ate each other. (Laughter.) He wanted to make a declaration: "You see, even the mouse and the cat can co-exist, so why cannot we co-exist with each other as human beings? If I can make

the cat and the mouse live together, how is that we human beings cannot live together in peace? Why do we have to fight each other like that? But they still considered him to be a mentally ill person, and they did not allow him to come in and meet the President. He appeared to be a disturbed person, but in fact he had a lot of wisdom. His name, again, was the Coconut Monk. Nguyen Thanh Minh was his "identity name," but people knew him as the Coconut Monk. So Peter saw him and quickly became friends with him in prison.

You know that Peter was a kind of Coconut Monk, too. He did not like the war, he wanted to end the war and bring peace to his people. His purpose was to find his mother, so that everything would be all right again. Because he was collaborating with prisoners in asking for the end of the war, he continued to get into trouble. At that time, not only was the Coconut Monk in prison; there were also other monks in prison. Peter was transferred to another prison where he met three hundred monks, who were in prison because they refused to be drafted into the army. When Peter came he suggested that they start a fast, to say that you cannot lock people up because they do not like the fighting. Many, many people joined the monks in a fast, and everywhere that Peter went he created a movement like that, so that he was described by the administration of the prison as a troublemaker. Finally, they could bear it any more, and they wanted to push Peter to the frontier, to North Vietnam, because he was in the south. There was a little bridge connecting one side of the river to the other, in the Demilitarized Zone, and the name of the river was the Ben Hai. They could not handle Peter, a twelve-year-old boy, so they wanted to expel him to North Vietnam.

In North Vietnam, many people welcomed him, and asked him about the situation in the south. He told people very honestly about the situation in the south, but they wanted to make him into an instrument of propaganda, telling only evil things about the south, and saying good things about the north. But he refused. Everywhere he went he always told the truth: that no one wanted the war, that everyone wanted peace. So the government of North Vietnam did not like him either, and he was exiled to a mountainous area where he had to cut trees and carry bamboo sticks, and he was always watched by a soldier.

One day he was working hard on a mountain, cutting bamboo trees, when he suddenly missed Blanche too much. He saw that the soldier, his guard, was there, and he sat down and began to sing. As he started to sing, all the birds in the area came and circled around him. The soldier was very surprised to see that, and Peter just walked away. He got out of the mountains, and tried to find a way down to the south, to meet Blanche.

Blanche had been living for more than six months in the school for the blind children. That night, Blanche could not sleep. She did not know why she could not sleep. The moon was very bright outside. She could not see the moonlight, yet she knew that the moon was there, and that outside everything was very alive. In the dark she found her flute, and she went out to sit in nature, and she began to play the flute. The sound of the flute guided Peter, so that he could find her, and they met each other again. When Peter recognized Blanche playing the flute, he came close to her, he took her in his arms, and he proposed that they get away from the school for the blind and go back to the mountain where they could find their thatched house again.

It was midnight, but with Peter beside Blanche, there was no danger. The children found their way out of the city, and they began to walk to the highlands, where they went in the direction of the mountain they had originally come from. When they arrived many days later at the thatched house, they did not see Mother. She was still lost, and had not been able to find her way home to the children. So Peter decided to invite Blanche to go to the top of the mountain where he originated. Blanche had never asked him who his mother and father were, and Peter himself did not know how he was born, or who his parents were. Because Blanche was blind, climbing the mountain took a long time. With Peter's help, Blanche took step after step, in order to climb the mountain, and finally they arrived at the top about 8:00 p.m., when it had already begun to get dark. Of course, Blanche did not see anything. Peter remembered that on top of the mountain there was a very beautiful rock, and in the rock there was a hollow that was as big as a grapefruit. Every night the dew would come and collect in that hollow, and Peter remembered that every time he drank the dew from that hollow he had gotten a lot of energy and happiness. He believed that if he could give that water to Blanche to drink, and if he could use some of it to wash her eyes, that she would recover her eyesight again. He had that conviction. That is why he had invited Blanche to come with him to the very top of the mountain.

When they arrived, it was about eight o'clock in the evening, and they were both very tired. Peter helped Blanche to lie down to sleep. They had a conversation before they slept, and he said that at midnight, when the dew began to fill up the hollow in the rock, he would wake her up so she could drink the water, and so he could use the water to wash her eyes, so that her sight could be restored. Blanche followed his advice, and lay down. Peter used his overcoat as a blanket, and put it on Blanche so that she could sleep. At midnight he woke her up, and helped her to climb up a few meters more, so she could reach the highest point of the mountain, the beautiful rock.

Imagine...it was a full moon night, the full moon night of the fourth month of the lunar calendar. You know, that was the night that the Buddha was born: the full moon night of the fourth month of the lunar calendar. It was exactly that night. So when they arrived at the top of the mountain, Peter used his hands to make a cup for the water, so Blanche could drink. Blanche felt that the atmosphere was very still, very sacred. Suddenly she felt that it was safer for her to kneel down in order to receive the wonderful water, so she knelt down and put her hands in the form of a lotus. By that time, Peter had taken water in his palms, and he gave it to her to drink. She knelt there in a very respectful way, and drank, little by little, that dew, that wonderful water, given to her by Peter. And as she continued to drink, she felt a new source of energy born in her. She felt very refreshed, very joyful. Finally, Peter used that water to wash her eyes three times, very carefully. After that he helped her to go back to the flat rock, and asked her to lie down and continue her sleep. He said, "Go to sleep my sister. I will also go to sleep with you. I will not be far from you. I will stay here and lie down and sleep also, very soon."

Blanche had a very deep and restoring sleep that night. In the morning, when she woke up, she was very surprised to have a very strange feeling. Suddenly she brought her hands to her eyes, because the light was so strong. She did not know that she had recovered her eyesight. She was so surprised when she woke up and had to bring both her hands up to hide her eyes from the light. Very slowly she began to peer through her fingers...and she saw the blue sky for the first time, after so long. And she knew that she had recovered her sight because of the wondrous dew that Peter had used to wash her eyes. She slowly sat

up and looked around. It was wonderful. It was the top of the mountain. All around her were the clouds and the dew and the mist covering everything, and she had the impression that she was on an island, completely separated from the world of suffering, war and destruction. It was like heaven. She was like a completely new person, and she was so glad. She was completely healed, she was a new being, and she was so happy. And then she began to think of Peter, and she began to call his name: "Peter! Peter!" and her voice echoed back to her. She heard no response from Peter, and she began to panic. Peter was no longer there.

Suddenly Blanche looked up and saw the stone. The stone was in the shape of a young boy, and it was exactly the shape of Peter. And she suddenly remembered what Peter told her at the foot of the mountain. Peter had said, "My sister, you asked me how I have learned to sing. I don't know. But I was on the top of the mountain for many, many years...I don't know how many years I was on the top of the mountain. I had the opportunity to listen to the wind, the rain, and the birds for I don't know how many millions of years, and suddenly I knew how to sing."

Peter may be a human being, but he may be something else – something more than a human being. Now Blanche saw Peter as a rock, and she believed that initially he was a rock, sitting on top of the mountain for many millions of years, until suddenly one day he heard the sound of the flute coming from the foot of the mountain. Peter had transformed himself into a little boy, and found his way out to see who was playing the flute. At that time, Peter had vowed to become Blanche's eyes. She remembered one day when she had said to Peter: "Peter, do you know that you are my eyes? With you around, I am no longer a blind person." All these kinds of memories came back to her, and suddenly she began to understand that Peter was her eyes. Peter would never disappear; he would always be there, because now she would always be able to see things again. Peter had not left her. Before that she could not bear it; she had cried, and she had pounded her chest, because there was a lot of attachment in her. She had wanted to be blind again so that Peter would appear to her again. But now, she was enlightened. She saw that now Peter was in her, in the form of eyes, and wherever she went, Peter would be with her. With that kind of understanding and enlightenment, the sorrow in her began to disappear, and she picked up her flute and began to play. And you know something? The flute now expressed her insight, and the clouds and the mist and the blue sky and the rock and the mountains and the trees all stopped, and listened deeply to the sound of her flute.

(Bell)

If you have eyes capable of seeing things around you, you know that Peter is always alive in you. The Buddha is someone who has wisdom, who has eyes capable of seeing things as they are. Many of us are blind because we are not capable of seeing things. We live in ignorance, we live in the dark, and we don't know where to go. We don't know how to rediscover our mothers. That is why we need the Buddha so much. The Buddha appears to us like a brother, and he serves as our eyes. Let us not try to find the Buddha in another person, let us try to find the Buddha within ourselves. We have the capacity of looking deeply in order to see the true nature of things, and if we have eyes capable of seeing things as they are, the Buddha is always with us.

I gave that story to a friend to read, and after reading it he said, "Peter is Jesus Christ." I said, "That is true." Jesus Christ is not an entity that you have to look for outside yourself; Jesus Christ is within you. He is the eyes that we need not to be blind any more. Our practice is always to get out of our blindness, to have the kind of eyes that can see things as they are. We know that Peter has not left us at any moment, because he is always in our hearts. If we know how to live mindfully, Peter is always there every moment in our daily lives.

Today the children may like to draw a picture with Blanche, the little girl, and with Peter. And after you have painted or drawn the two children, make another drawing, and this time draw just one person, and in that person you can see both Blanche and Peter at the same time. So, happy practice today. When you hear the bell, you stand up and you bow to the Sangha, and you go out for continued practice.

Dear friends, there is always a better way to practice listening to the bell. When you listen to the bell you may like to allow all your ancestors to listen at the same time. Because all our ancestors are still alive within us, and they are there in every cell of our body. You invite your ancestors to listen to the bell with you; the bell is a voice calling you back to the here and the now, for you to become fully alive again. The sound, first of all, seems to be something outside of you, but if you listen that way, the sound is coming from deep within...the voice of the Buddha inside, calling you back to the safe island of self, and the voice of your ancestors calling you back to life. That is why the sound of the bell is neither outside nor inside, because the reality transcends notions of outside or inside. You can listen deeply, better than when you first began the practice. Allow every cell in your body to open up, so that the sound of the bell can penetrate deep into each cell of your body, or in a different way you can say that you open every cell up so that the sound can come out of it. Your ancestors, whether blood ancestors or spiritual ancestors, are there, present in every cell of your body, and the sound of the bell might come from there or from outside--it does not matter. But to listen to the calling, and to go back to life, to be awake, to be alive, to be in the present moment, is our practice.

Maybe many of our ancestors did not have the chance to practice listening to the bell, and to become fully alive and present in the here and the now, and now you are doing it for them. And suddenly, just by taking one in-breath, you make all your ancestors fully alive at the same time. This is what we can do. Among us there are those who can do it. They sit there with you, they listen to the same sound of the bell, but they can go very deep, they can go very high. So it depends on your insight, your visualization, your concentration, whether the effect of the sound of the bell is deep or not deep enough. Every time you walk, you do the same. You are not a separate entity, and you know that you can walk in such a way that all your ancestors can make the same steps with you, at the same time. When you take a step, your mother also takes a step, your father, your grandmother, your grandfather, and all your ancestors, are taking a step, and the Buddha walks with you, taking that very step with you. Peter is always there. Peter is walking with you at every moment, and walking like that is to liberate yourself from the prison of sorrow that you have locked yourself into. Walking like that can be very liberating. If you walk like that you don't walk just as a separate individual. You walk in such a way that all your ancestors, blood and spiritual, walk with you. You know that you carry within you all generations of ancestors, and more than that, you carry within you all future generations. Even if you are still very young, your children are already there within

yourself, and their children are already there within you. So make a step for all of them, liberate them, liberate our ancestors, and liberate the future generations, by just making one step. And if you can make such a step, you can make two, and you can make three. The practice can go very, very deep.

I would like to share with you a poem that I have been using for eight years now, but it is not available in English or in French. Among you there are poets and composers...I hope you can make it into a piece of music to help with your practice.

Thay recites a poem, consisting of two four-line stanzas.)

*Eating in the ultimate dimension,*

This is for you to practice during lunchtime. Today you have a formal lunch.

*Eating in the ultimate dimension*—because there are two dimensions to reality. The first dimension is called the historical dimension. In this dimension of reality you can see the beginning and the ending, the inside and the outside, birth and death, more or less, the coming and the going. It is the dimension of the waves, because looking at each wave you have the impression that there is a beginning to every wave, an ending to every wave, the being and the non-being of the wave. First we think that there was the non-being of the wave, and suddenly there is the being of the wave. And after that there is again the non-being of the wave. So in that historical dimension it seems that all these things exist: being, non-being, beginning, ending, high or low, more or less beautiful, and so on. These kinds of ideas create a lot of suffering and despair and jealousy and anger. So when you are in the historical dimension, please be very careful not to be caught by it.

Then there is another dimension called the ultimate dimension. This ultimate dimension is not separate from the historical dimension. In the case of the wave, it is water, because water cannot be separated from waves; but when you touch water, you don't see a beginning, an ending, high or low, being or non-being--these notions that we use to speak of waves. The fact is that the wave is a wave, but while living the life of a wave, the wave can very well live the life of water at the same time. So when you live in your historical dimension, you should train yourself touch and to live the ultimate dimension at the same time. That is our practice: be the wave...okay, but you have to be the water. If you are to become stable, free, if you want to have the elements of non-fear and non-discrimination within you, then touching the ultimate dimension is a necessary practice.

A wave can be subject to fear, to jealousy, to discrimination, if she lives very superficially in the historical dimension. She sees that there is a beginning to her life, an end to her life, she sees that she is not the other waves, that she is more or less beautiful than the other waves, that she is struggling with the other waves, and that she suffers quite a lot. But if she bends down and touches the nature of water within her, she sees that she is in the other waves, the other waves are in her, and there is really no beginning and no end, and because of that she gets out of fear, and discrimination and jealousy. So touching the historical dimension deeply, you touch the ultimate dimension. And when you are able to touch the ultimate dimension, all discrimination and fear vanish, and you get the real peace that you deserve.

When you listen to the bell, you can try to listen to the bell in the ultimate dimension, in order to realize that the bell is always there—it's not because the sister uses a stick and makes contact that the sound is born. The sound is always there. The nature of the sound is no-birth and no-death, always existing. You also share the same nature. Your true nature is the nature of no birth, no death, no beginning, and no end. Unless you touch your true nature of no-birth, no death, you cannot obtain that kind of insight, the insight of no-birth and no-death that will bring to you the element of non-fear, non-discrimination. If you continue to be the victim of discrimination and fear, then suffering is going to continue for a long time. The greatest relief is to be obtained only when you are capable of touching the ultimate dimension. In touching the ultimate dimension, you don't have to reach out. A wave doesn't have to reach out in order to touch water, because she is water. Peter is within you, Peter is not a separate identity. While living every moment of your daily life, learn how to touch Peter in you. The nature of Peter is the nature of no-birth and no-death, no coming and no going, and you share the same nature with Peter.

*Eating in the ultimate dimension, I nourish all my ancestors.* I keep my ancestors alive, because every spoonful that you take is to nourish you, of course, but it is also to keep all your ancestors alive at the same time. By feeding yourself you are feeding all your ancestors, and also your children and their children. Taking one spoonful of food, you know that you are feeding all your ancestors and your children and grandchildren. It is just like walking. All my ancestors walk with me.

When you are in your sitting position, and enjoying breathing in and breathing out, try breathing for your mother, your father, your grandpa, your grandma, or anyone. This is very pleasant to practice. Pick someone, call his or her name: "Mother, please breathe with me." And that is not a visualization that is the truth. When you breathe, your mother in you breathes also. When you were a tiny living being in the womb of your mother, every time your mother breathed in, you breathed in; every time your mother ate, you ate. The same thing happens now, every time you breathe in, your mother breathes in, your ancestors breathe in, and your child who is already there, or who is to manifest later, they are all breathing in with you. That is the way to breathe in order to touch the nature of no self. People talk a lot about no self, but they don't know exactly what it is. Here we are not talking about no self, we are living the reality of non-self. When you breathe, you breathe for all your ancestors and your children.

Every thing you do, you do not for yourself alone, you do for us all. And walking like that, breathing like that, listening like that, you are touching the nature of no self. And when you touch the nature of no self, you touch the ultimate dimension. There is no "I," there is no "you," because I am in you, and you are in me. We inter-are. That is not only true with Peter and Blanche, but it is true of everyone else.

*Eating in the ultimate dimension, you maintain alive all the generations of ancestors.*

*You allow, you help coming generations to find a way to go up.*



"To go up," means to transcend suffering, to transcend discrimination, to liberate ourselves, our situation and society. We are still caught up with many negative things: discrimination, violence, hatred and so on. So eat in such a way that you can open the way for future generations to transcend all these negative things.

When I sit with you and I eat my meal, I practice that. I chew with these words: *I touch deeply the food, I touch deeply the Sangha embracing me, the Sangha in which I take refuge; I allow my ancestors to eat, my children and grandchildren to eat at the same time with me, and I touch the ultimate dimension during the time of eating.* Those are the first four lines. The next four lines: *eating in the ultimate dimension, you chew in the same way that you breathe, with real rhythm.*

You chew and you are aware of what you are chewing. You are aware of the food in your mouth. You chew, and you touch the very nature of the food in your mouth. Eating mindfully is to be aware of what you are eating. If you are mindful, then you can discover the true nature of the food, which is also the nature of inter-being.

Yesterday I talked about the milk we drink every morning. Drinking the milk, you know that it is not only sweet, but that it is also somehow bitter, because of the way we raise the cows, we treat the calves, and so on. We can be aware, when we chew the food, or when we look deeply into the food: we can see the ingredients, the elements that have come together to produce that food. A piece of carrot, a piece of string bean, a piece of tofu, a grain of rice, all these things contain the whole universe, and if you look deeply, you can see the lives of other living beings in it. You can see the compost; you can even see the dry bones of other living beings in the refreshing piece of tofu. A piece of tofu is not only vegetarian. The dry bones of tiny living beings have become compost, and the grain of rice, the piece of tofu, the piece of string bean, contain all of that: the sunshine, the wind, the clouds. Vegetarian and non-vegetarian, all that is inside each piece of food. So if you know that, you will know how to eat in order to keep your compassion alive.

If we know how to produce our food in such a way that we can reduce violence and destruction, and decrease the suffering of living beings, we are keeping alive the compassion inside. The one who grows food, and the one who eats the food, both can help to maintain the compassion within our hearts. We know very well that without that element of compassion within us, we cannot be happy persons. Without compassion we cannot relate to any living beings, including humans. Eating, walking, doing your daily activities—we should learn how to do these things mindfully, in a way that can help compassion to stay alive in us. This is very important, that is our practice, for eating is also to preserve our compassion, because you don't want to eat the flesh of your own son.

Yesterday Sister Annabel gave a wonderful talk on the Four Nutriments, in English, and those of you in the Lower Hamlet may like to listen to it. Sister Chan Duc elaborated the teaching I had offered the day before on the Four Nutriments. I only spoke about the first two nutriments, and she continued with the third and the fourth. I was talking one day about the therapist as someone who can cook for us, offering us the kind of food that can keep our bodies and our souls sane and healthy. The therapist should also be an architect, in order to create an environment where we feel safe, where we can live our lives with freedom, with stability, where we can be protected, where we will not be destroyed by sickness, depression, and so on. A therapist should practice like an architect, like a cook,

like a teacher, like a monk, like a Buddha, creating space where you feel safe, where you get only the sane kind of food, that won't destroy your body or your consciousness. In our daily lives we consume so many toxins and poisons, we consume a lot of violence and craving and suspicion and despair, and destroy ourselves. So the therapist, like a Buddha, should be able to create a Pure Land, so that people can come and be protected and be healed, be transformed. The therapist should be at the same time a Sangha builder, a Sangha convener, a summoner of practitioners, so that among us there are those who have a solid and joyful practice to support us, to remind us, and to teach us how to live deeply every moment of our daily lives, to breathe, to walk, to listen to the bell, to enjoy our lunch together. Therefore the therapists, like the physicians, have to come together to operate as a Sangha, because alone they cannot fulfill their task of being an architect, a cook, a Sangha builder, of being a Pure Land. Therefore, all of us have to follow the same principle of creating the Pure Land and building a Sangha.

*Eating in the ultimate dimension, I chew as I breathe, with rhythm.* You might use this gatha, this poem, in order to chew your food, and keep your awareness alive, and touch the ultimate dimension while eating your lunch

*Aware of the suffering, we nourish each other. The main thing is to maintain compassion alive, and to help beings going to the other shore.*

When we eat, we have to be aware of the suffering also. That does not mean that we have to suffer, because eating can be very joyful, but the background should be always there. To have an opportunity to sit down quietly like that, to have enough time to spend with the Sangha, and to eat this amount of food together in an atmosphere of safety, of friendship and of awareness, is something not many people can afford. That can give rise to a lot of happiness, but you know that happiness is always seen against the background of suffering, in order for happiness to continue. The moment when you exile suffering, happiness will no longer be happiness. It's as with black and white: white will appear very clearly against a dark background. Happiness is also like that. So, we are with the Sangha, enjoying a meal in mindfulness, the joy of being with the Sangha, the joy of feeling protected and supported by the collective energy of the Sangha; and yet we know that suffering is there in life, in every grain of rice, in every piece of tofu, in every spoonful of milk. That is why we take the vow that, although we have to suffer when we feed each other, we accept that in order for a chance for every living being to go to the other shore, the shore of enlightenment, the shore of safety.

Living beings eat each other, that is a fact. Tigers eat the deer, big fish eat the small fish, and we also consume other living beings. Even if we are vegetarians we can only reduce the eating of living beings to some degree. That is why there is the words '*Aware of the suffering*' inside, because there is a little bit of suffering in that taste of happiness, enough to keep our awareness alive. Even if I have to become your food, I will practice in order not to let hatred become my nature. I offer myself to you so that you can survive. That is the reality of the world: living beings are eating each other. As practitioners, we cannot entirely escape that situation, but our practice is to keep compassion alive, and to relieve as much suffering as we can through our way of daily living

*Aware of the suffering we try to feed each other, even with ourselves. The main thing is to keep compassion alive, and to help beings to the other shore, the shore of safety, stability and freedom.*

I think human beings can be described as having a safer life than other living beings. Although we have no right to hunt each other or kill each other--the law forbids it--if we continue to create war, to exploit each other, to make use of others to get rich, to consume more, and we continue to do these things at the expense of other living beings, it is as though we are eating the flesh of our father or mother, our brothers. We are actually one with all of these beings, whether they live in an over-developed country or an under-developed country. We know that if we learn how to refrain from making war, from creating more social injustice and repression, we can bring much more safety to human beings, and at the same time we can better protect the lives of other living beings. Now, war and alcohol and drugs and consumption and violence are making us much less safe in our lives as human beings. In fact, human beings can put themselves in a much safer situation than other living beings, but because of our cravings and discrimination, we have made our situation much less safe than it could be. That is why our practice is to be aware, to be mindful, to live each moment of our lives deeply, so that we can keep compassion alive in our hearts, so that our lives and the lives of those around us become safer. When we enjoy more safety, we will be able to provide more safety to other living beings. We can protect the environment; protect the ecosystem, so that other living beings can also enjoy safety.

*With the awareness of suffering in my heart, we nourish each other. We know that the main thing is to keep compassion alive and to help living beings cross to the other shore, the shore of greater safety, the shore of more freedom."* It is so easy to practice in Vietnamese, because it is the kind of poem that has only five words in each line.

I use the poem in order to maintain my mindfulness of life. You might like to use that poem in English, or German. You might rewrite it so that it will fit the rhythm of your practice.

*I am blooming as a flower, I am fresh as the dew.* I chew according to this gatha also. I also use the gatha: *This is the Pure Land, the Pure Land is here.* This also is a song that is available in Vietnamese, but our friends who do not speak Vietnamese have not had a chance to learn and to practice it. Thay Doji has tried to translate it into French; but because he used the Vietnamese music, it does not sound very natural to the French ear, so I hope that someone will help with new music. Each line has only four words:

Day la tinh do  
Tinh do la day  
Mim cuoi chanh niem  
An tru hom nay.  
But la la chin  
Phap la may bay  
Tang than khap chon  
Que huong noi nay.  
Tho vao hoa no  
Tho ra truc lay

Tam khong rang buoc

Tieu dao thang ngay.

I chew my food with this poem. And the meaning is this:

This is the pure land;

The pure land is right here.

This mindful smile helps me

To establish myself in the present moment.

Look, I see the Buddha as a red leaf,

And the dharma as a cloud.

My Sangha is everywhere,

And my true homeland is just right here.

Breathing in, I see the chrysanthemum blooming;

Breathing out, I see the bamboo bending.

My mind is totally free,

And I enjoy it day after day.

During that time of breathing, you keep the Pure Land alive, in the here and the now.

Yesterday I said that it's up to you to choose either hell or the Pure Land, because both hell and the Pure Land are there in every cell of your body. If you allow hell to manifest, it will manifest. All of us have experienced how hot hell is, but if you want to choose the Pure Land, you can do that. Just make use of your breathing, your walking, in order to make the Pure Land manifest. With these methods of walking, of breathing, of eating, you keep the Pure Land alive. You don't have to die in order to enter the Kingdom of God; in fact, you have to be very alive to do so. With full awareness, when you become fully alive, you only need to make one step, and there you are—in the Kingdom of God.

So I repeat this gatha:

This is the Pure Land

The Pure Land is here.

This mindful smile helps me

To establish myself in the present moment.

Look! I see the Buddha as a red leaf;

Look! I see the Dharma as a cloud.

My Sangha is everywhere...

Everything I see, I identify as elements of my Sangha--the blue sky, the clouds, the leaves, the trees, the birds, the pebbles, the path where I practice walking meditation--everything belongs to my Sangha. I don't have to go back to my hometown in order to find my Sangha. My Sangha is everywhere. Everything around me supports my being awake. Every sound, every sight supports and maintains me in the Pure Land. My lack of mindfulness alone can bring me out of the Pure Land, but everything else around me is supporting me in order to nourish me in the Pure Land.

My Sangha is everywhere,

And my true home is right here in the here and the now.

Breathing in, I see the chrysanthemum blooming,

Breathing out I see the bamboo bending

My mind is fully free,

And I enjoy it day after day, month after month.

Please make use of that gatha, rewrite it in German, in Italian, in English, in French. We offer it to our friends as a gatha of practice for our walking meditation, our sitting meditation, and our mindful lunch.

There was a nuclear scientist who lived in England, named David Bohm. He used the terms "the explicate order" and "the implicate order." His insight is similar to the insight of the historical dimension and the ultimate dimension. He said that in the explicate order, you see things outside of each other. A table is outside of a flower, and you are outside of me. But the other dimension of reality can be called implicate order, that is, if you look deeply, you see that the flower is in the table and that the table is in the flower. One electron can be everywhere at the same time, and one electron is made of every electron, and so on. It is very much the insight of inter-being, and in the implicate order, everything contains everything else. Just as I said yesterday, looking deeply into a flower you can see a cloud, you can see the sunshine, you can see the earth, you can see the compost, you can see everything in the cosmos within it. So, we know that looking deeply helps us to see the ultimate dimension, the implicate order, and we get rid of notions like inside and outside, this or that; we get rid of pairs of opposites.

In Buddhist language, we have the term *nirvana*. It is another term to describe the ultimate dimension of reality. Nirvana means first of all extinction. You may ask, extinction of what? It is first of all the extinction of ideas, such as birth and death, inside and outside, being and non-being. These ideas are responsible for our fear, our illusion, our suffering, our discrimination. Inside my right hand there is the wisdom of nondiscrimination. My right hand never discriminates against my left hand. The insight of inter-being is there in my right hand, in both hands. That is why they can be together all the time, they can be in harmony with each other all the time. Nirvana is first of all the extinction of ideas, of pairs of opposites. It also means the extinction of the kind of suffering that can be created by these ideas. Because of these ideas, we have created a lot of fear and suffering, so when we are able to remove the ideas, then we can remove the suffering caused by these ideas. Death for instance--death is an idea. And birth is also an idea.

When you look deeply into a sheet of paper, and also into yourself, you will be able to touch your nature of no-birth and no-death. To be born, according to our idea, is to become something from nothing. From no one, you suddenly become someone. That is our idea of birth. But if we practice looking deeply, we see that that is a wrong idea, because nothing can become something from nothing. A sheet of paper, before it came into existence, had been something else. You can see a sheet of paper in a tree, you can see a sheet of paper in a cloud, because touching this sheet of paper with your mindfulness, you can see a cloud inside. You don't have to be a poet in order to see that: you know that if there were no cloud there would no rain, and no tree could grow. If the tree could not grow, you could not have the sheet of paper, because this sheet of paper is made from a kind of paste made of trees. So it is sure that the cloud is in the sheet of paper, and if you try to remove the cloud, the sheet of paper will collapse. There would be no paper at all if there were no cloud. That is inter-being—the cloud is inside the paper.

You can see that the sheet of paper was not born from nothing it was born from something. It was born from the cloud, and from the sunshine, because the sunshine also

helped the tree to grow. It was born from the logger, who cut down the tree, and it was also born from many other elements. So, before the sheet of paper was born, it had already been something. The day of its birth is only a day of continuation. You can see the previous lives of the sheet of paper. That is why it is better to celebrate our birthdays by singing "Happy Continuation Day." Really the moment of your birth is only a moment of continuation. Before you were born of your mother, you had been there in her for many months. That was not exactly the day of your birth. You may be tempted to think that the real day of your birth was the day of your conception, but if you ask the same questions, you will find out that even before that day you had already been there somewhere. Maybe half in your father, or before your father was born, you had been there in your grandfather, in your grandmother. It is a very interesting trip to go and search for your identity, your origin. In the Zen circles, they sometimes give as a subject of meditation a question such as, "Tell me what your face looked like before your grandmother was born?" That is an invitation for you to go and find out your true nature. If you do well, you will touch the nature of no-birth and no-death. You will know that you have never been born. You have gone through a series of transformations, of renewals, but the idea of being born is just an idea. If you have never been born, how can you die? The idea of dying is that from something you suddenly become nothing, from someone, you suddenly become no one.

When we burn this sheet of paper, you may think that it will die and become nothing, but that is not true. After it is burned, the sheet of paper becomes clouds again, becomes smoke, becomes ash, and becomes the heat that penetrates your body and the cosmos. It would be very interesting if you could follow the journey of the sheet of paper. You could go to the cloud and observe what the cloud is doing, and what the sheet of paper is doing. You could go after the heat produced by the burning of the sheet of paper, and see how far it can go, and what it will produce in the future. You could follow the amount of ash, to see what kind of flower it will become in a few months. It would be a very interesting discovery. The true nature of the sheet of paper is no-birth and no-death, and you also share the same kind of nature. Your true nature is no-birth and no-death, and that nature we call nirvana. The Buddha said that you can touch nirvana, even with your body. You can touch your true nature of no-birth and no-death, even with your body. It is like the wave—the wave can touch her nature, namely water, but she is water. What is the subject of touching and what is the object of touching, when the wave touches water? She is already water, why does she have to touch it? Nirvana is our true nature, Peter is our true nature, and we don't have to look for him or for her. Our true nature is no-birth and no-death. With the practice of deep listening, of deep touching, of deep looking, we will be able to touch our true nature, and we will be able to free ourselves from notions, from ideas, from fear, from discrimination, and that is the way we can get the greatest relief with the practice.

Yesterday there was a question on life and death: from where have we come, and after dying, what are we going to be? The most important topic of meditation is life and death. They always say so; the matter of life and death is the greatest subject of meditation. The business of life and death is a big business, which means it is the object of your meditation. When meditating on the object of life and death, you will be able to touch the ultimate dimension, the nature of no-life and no-death, and you will touch nirvana, even with your body.

So there is a continuation. You might come to a practice center to learn the practice in order to get some relief, to undergo some transformation and healing. You might suffer less because of the practice of sitting and walking and breathing, total relaxation, touching the earth...yes! But the greatest relief can only be obtained if you are able to touch nirvana, to touch the ultimate dimension, and that is not something outside of our capacity. When we look at the wave, we know that the wave can lead her life as a wave, but if she knows how to live her life as water, the quality of her life will be much greater. She will not suffer a lot, like the other waves who don't know that they are, at the same time, water.

(Three Bells—end of Dharma Talk)

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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## *The Search for the Beautiful, the True, and the Good*

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Good morning, dear friends. Today is the 31<sup>st</sup> of July, 1998. We are in the New Hamlet, and today we are speaking in French.

Everywhere in France, when we go on a journey, we see churches. If you go into a church, you see Jesus Christ, you see the Virgin Mary. In Vietnam, when you go on a journey, you see only Buddhist temples, and every time you go into a Buddhist temple you can see the *Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara*. Avalokiteshvara is a person with many, many arms, maybe a hundred, a thousand arms. It's so strange to have a person with so many arms. Avalokiteshvara is someone who has the ability to listen deeply, in order to be able to understand. We call Avalokiteshvara a bodhisattva. A bodhisattva is a being, a person who has woken up, who is always there, awake. The Buddha is also a bodhisattva, because the Buddha is an awakened person. Sometimes we are also awakened persons, because sometimes we are very aware, truly present, with the capacity, the ability to see and understand, to love. Therefore, we also have the potential of being awakened beings, bodhisattvas or Buddhas. The word *bodhisattva* is made up of two parts, "bodhi" which means awakening, and "sattva", which means a living being. We have said that the Buddha Shakyamuni arrived at perfect awakening at the foot of a tree, and that tree is called the Bodhi Tree, the tree of awakening.

It may create a strange impression, when you go into a Buddhist temple and see someone sitting with a hundred or a thousand arms. You may wonder why should somebody need so many arms? I will tell you. This person has a lot of love, and the energy of love in her is very great. And that energy needs to be shown in action. When we love, we have to do something, and when the bodhisattva loves deeply, the bodhisattva looks for ways to act in order to show this love. Therefore, in order to do something, we need to act, and two arms are not enough. We need more than two arms. Look at your mommy. She has two arms. But sometimes she has so many things to do, she wishes she had five or six arms. So many things to look after: the housework is one thing, her child who is crying, her child who needs her, her husband, her family, her father, her mother, her friends, and society, which is asking for her attention as well, the people who are suffering in the world. Your mother has love in her heart, and she wants to do many things in order to express her love, but she has only two arms, and therefore she wishes she had more arms. In her there is a bodhisattva, an awakened being who loves and who wants to do so many things to help the world to suffer less.

Therefore you understand now why the bodhisattva has so many arms, and if you will come close you will see other things too. You will realize that in each hand of this bodhisattva there is something. Look carefully, and you will see that in each hand there is an eye in the palm. Look carefully, every hand of the bodhisattva has an eye in it. Why does it have an eye? Because, when you do something, when you act, you need to do it very carefully, to be sure that what you do makes the other person happy, and doesn't make the other person suffer. You want to make somebody happy. You really have the good heart, the good will, to do that. You really have love and want to do that. But if you are not careful enough, not mindful enough when you do it, you might make that other person suffer. Therefore, to love is to understand, and the eye in your hand is to be able to look and to understand. A hand is there, ready to do something. You are ready to do something to make somebody happy. The person before you may be your father, your mother, your little girl or your little boy, and this hand is made to make your love possible. You have one hand, and with that hand you are going to make the other person happy, the person you love. But sometimes, or often, although you want to make the other person happy, you make them suffer.

Daddy is someone who always wants to make his child happy, his daughter happy, his son happy, but sometimes father makes his son and daughter suffer, because he loves them, yet he doesn't understand them. He has his hand, his arm, ready to make his son or daughter happy, but maybe he does not have an eye in his hand, and that is why he has not understood the needs of his daughter or his son. If you love someone and you want to make him or her happy, you should look carefully before you do something. Put an eye in your hand, and look carefully at the person you want to help, and ask yourself this question: now, have I understood the person who is in front of me well enough? Am I acquainted with his suffering, with her difficulties? Do I know his or her deep wants and desires? These questions are very important. In Buddhism we learn to look deeply in order to be able to understand the difficulties, the suffering, which is there in the other person. We have to look deeply, carefully, in order to see the deep desires, the real desires, of the other person before we do something, or before we act. Therefore the practice of Buddhist meditation is to put an eye in your hand.

Now, let us try to look at our hands: our left hand and our right hand. And we can ask this question: is there an eye in my hand? You are not sure that the eye is there. You know that you love your mommy, you love your daddy, you know that your mother and your father love you; yet sometimes we do something to make each other suffer. Why? It's because understanding is not deep enough, there is not enough understanding, or maybe none at all. Buddhist meditation is to help us use the eye in our hand in order to understand. With understanding we can act, and that action will bring about a lot of happiness for the person we love.

The Buddha is someone who understands, and thanks to this understanding he is able to love and not make other people suffer. The Buddha, before becoming a Buddha, suffered when he was a child, suffered when he was a teenager. He was looking everywhere in order to be able to become an understanding person, and a loving person. According to the teaching of the Buddha, understanding is another word for love, because if we do not understand, we cannot really love. Therefore the essence of love is understanding. If you have the eye which has been handed down to you by the Buddha, with that eye you can practice looking deeply at the person you love. Looking like that you will see and you will understand, and this deep looking, this insight, this understanding, will bring about real love in you, and whatever you say, whatever you do, will bring about happiness in the other person. That is why, when we say the Three Refuges, we say, "I take refuge in the Buddha, the one who



shows me the way in this life. I take refuge in the Dharma, the way of understanding and love." You can say that the path of Buddhist meditation is the path of understanding and love.

I am going to offer you an exercise you can do. All of us suffer sometimes, grown-up people as well as children. When we suffer, we feel like crying, or feel like shouting. The children might do that, and the adults also feel like doing the same thing. Sometimes you might have seen your mommy crying all alone, because she is suffering. As her son or her daughter, or a young person, can you do something to help your mommy suffer less? That is practice. I am sure you have already tried to do something to help your mother suffer less. I have seen children who have come to their mommy when she is crying and take her hand, and with some very kind words, say "Mommy, don't cry, I am here for you. Mommy, don't cry anymore." There are children who can do that, and they do it all alone. No one has to tell them to do that. That is because the child has love in her, and she knows that when someone suffers, they need somebody else to be there with them, and then they will suffer less.

You know very well that when a child is suffering like the mother, the child cannot help the mother. But when the child is calm and happy, then that child can support the mother, and bring help to the mother. When you take a deep in-breath, "Breathing in I feel the in-breath, breathing out, I feel I am breathing out," you feel peaceful, and you feel you are really there for your mommy. And you can go towards your mother, and sit down close to her, and you can say to her, "Mommy, I know you are suffering, but I am here, so don't cry anymore." Your presence is very important for your mommy. Your presence is made out of love. If you can go a little bit further in understanding, I think you will be able to alleviate a lot of your mommy's suffering, that is, if you know how to use the eye that has been handed down to you by the Buddha, you will be able to understand why your mommy is crying, why she is suffering. A child, even when still very young, can understand his father's or his mother's suffering. If you are aware, if you notice what is happening in your family, if you can be really there with the people you love, then understanding will be possible.

Let us listen to the sound of the bell.

(Bell)

Here's what I'd like to tell you. Your presence, close to your mother, will be a big help. If you can show her that you have the ability to understand her suffering, that will help her a great deal, and will make her feel so much better. This understanding of yours is because you have been attentive, you have looked at your mommy carefully, but maybe you need to ask your mommy to help you understand her better. If you are interested, if you want your mommy to be happy, you will ask her questions in order to understand better how she suffers, what she worries about, what her difficulties are. "Mommy, why are you crying? Mommy, are you suffering inside? Can you tell me something that you have in your heart?" A child can always ask this kind of question, with a lot of care and love, and then a mother will feel like sharing her difficulties with her children, and that will help your understanding of your mother to grow, and your love for your mother will become deeper. You should remember that real love, deep love, is made out of understanding. Therefore, if you can cultivate understanding, you can develop your love, and that will help a great deal, that will make your mommy happy, or your daddy happy, or anyone you love happy.

Someone alone cannot lift a heavy suitcase on his or her own. We need someone to help us carry heavy luggage. If you have strength, if you have energy, you can give a hand to help lift up the suitcase and carry it to the car with the other person. You bring help to the other person. So, suffering, pain, is something we can help another person to carry. It is heavy. You can support somebody who is suffering with your moral strength, with your love. When someone needs your physical strength, you give him or her your physical strength, and when someone needs your spiritual strength, you can give your spiritual support. Someone who is suffering always needs your spiritual support, your understanding, your love, your real presence. That is the spiritual support which the other person is waiting for. When you suffer as a child, your mother always tries to be near you with her stability, her gentleness. She sits near you, and she says, "My dear child, I am here for you." She is there to give you her spiritual support. Human beings, like all other beings, suffer, and need others in order to suffer less. The practice of Buddhist meditation is to enable us to cultivate spiritual power, to be able to help others, and to help ourselves to suffer less.

When you hear the sound of the bell, the little children will stand up and bow to the Sangha before leaving the meditation hall.

(Bell)

My dear friends, we have all known love and suffered because of it. Maybe we haven't had the time to be able to look deeply into the nature of our love, to sum up what our love was about, to be able to understand what we did when we loved, and to understand why suffering arose from it. In Buddhism, the meaning of love is very deep, but also very clear, and it is necessary to have time to look deeply into the nature of our love, in order to be able to cultivate the elements which make true love.

All of us need to love. We need something beautiful, true and good, and we are looking for the beautiful, the true, and the good. We feel that these things don't exist in us, that what is really beautiful, what is really true, and what is really good, is not in us. Therefore we look for it, and sometimes we feel that we have found the object of our love. The person before us is a symbol of what is beautiful, of what is true, and we fall in love with that person. We have found the object of our love.

There are two things to be looked at. The first is the impression that this beauty, this truth, this goodness, is not in us. The second thing is that we feel that what we are looking for must be outside us, and therefore we feel that this person is the object of our love, and we feel satisfied and happy. That is the foundation of our love, but after a time we discover reality is not what we thought. The other person, the object of our love, shows herself or himself to be different from what we thought in the first place. We are disappointed, and we keep looking for the beautiful, the good, and the true.

Antoine de St. Exupery wrote something like this: "To love is not to look at each other, but to look in the same direction." But when we love each other, we have to look at each other. Because the other symbolizes beauty, truth, and goodness for us, we really need to look at each other. Beauty and truth seem to be one thing, goodness also. And when we love, we tend to see in

the other person the combination of the beautiful, the good and the true, and it gives us great pleasure to look. That is our happiness. But since we do not know the art of mindful living, we make mistakes in our daily lives, and internal formations arise in us and in the other. Pain, anger, jealousy, all these things show themselves bit by bit in ourselves, and in the other, the object of our love. We make the object of our love suffer, we do not understand them well enough, we are not patient enough, we are not tolerant enough, and we make them suffer. There is a slow change in each of us, and one day we find that looking at the other person no longer brings us happiness. In the beginning, when I looked at you, it made me happy. Just to look at you gave me so much happiness, but now, that is not true anymore. When I look at you I suffer. It is because you symbolize suffering for me. I am already suffering, but you are also suffering, so looking at suffering is not something pleasant. So both of us sign a contract: we won't look at each other any more, we will look in the same direction. And usually that direction is the television set, so we don't have to look at each other anymore.

Because we no longer see the truth, the beauty and the goodness in the other person, we are disappointed, and we are tempted to look for the beautiful, the good and true elsewhere in the universe, to find another person who can really offer us beauty, goodness and truth. We have traveled throughout the world looking for that person. Each one of us is like a pot without its lid, and we are travelling the world looking for our lid. The same thing happens in the spiritual realm. We are thirsty for truth, we are thirsty for goodness, for compassion, we are thirsty for spiritual beauty, and we are looking for these things. We meet someone, a spiritual teacher, a spiritual friend, and we feel so happy. To be able to sit there and look at the teacher, look at the spiritual friend, brings us a great deal of happiness, but this does not last very long, because the discovery may be a false discovery. We may have a wrong perception of this person who represents truth, goodness and beauty, just as in the realm of falling in love.

We thought we had found the ideal woman, the ideal man, in our life, but maybe it is a wrong perception, and in the spiritual realm it is the same thing. We think we have found someone who stands for truth, compassion and beauty, but once again, this can be a wrong perception on our part. When we have contemplated, when we have spent time with that teacher, that spiritual friend, we discover slowly that this person is not really the object of our love. We are disappointed in that person, and we keep looking in the cosmos. If you are lucky, you will meet a master, a spiritual teacher like the Buddha, and the teacher will say to you, "Look deeply in yourself, don't look for these things somewhere else." The true teacher is someone who helps you to discover again the real teacher in yourself.

When he woke up at the foot of the Bodhi Tree, the Buddha Shakyamuni said, "How strange-all beings possess in themselves the capacity to understand, the capacity to love, the capacity to be free. Everyone has that capacity, but everyone allows himself or herself to be carried away on the ocean of suffering. How strange." This is what the Buddha declared at the moment of his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. He noticed that what we are looking for, day and night, is already there within oneself. What is beautiful, what is true, what is good, is already there in oneself. We can call it the Buddha-nature, the Buddhahood, the awakened nature, the true freedom, which is the foundation for all peace and happiness. This wonderful thing is in us, and a real teacher is someone who can help you to touch that thing in yourself, who helps give birth, to bring about the real teacher which already exists in yourself.

In the process of love, when you love someone, you can be lucky enough to recognize in the person you love the elements of beauty, of goodness, and of truth. If these elements are real, you have an opportunity to go back to yourself and rediscover the same things which already exist in you. It is possible that the person who is the object of your love also possesses within him or herself the elements of beauty, goodness and truth. Then you are lucky. And if you are lucky like this, you are happy to have this. Therefore you have an opportunity to rediscover the reality of these things in yourself. And the person who can help you to rediscover and touch the source of peace in yourself, the source of freedom, the source of happiness in yourself, is a spiritual friend. You are under the illusion that you don't have goodness, truth and beauty in yourself, and that is why you look for them in somebody else. But when you meet the Buddha, the Buddha will tell you that you have these things, you have this foundation of freedom, of peace, and of love within yourself.

These are not things you can obtain from outside of yourself. These are things that are already available within you, and our practice is to do everything we can in order to bring these things to the light, to bring freedom, fearlessness to the light. The person and the instrument which you use in order to find these things is the deep looking and the deep listening to yourself. In you, there are elements which make up your personality, and we can call these elements the five skandhas.

I am drawing an orange on the board, with five sections. The first section represents form or body, our physical body. The second section represents feelings; the third: perceptions; the fourth: mental formations; and the fifth: consciousness. The five elements are the territory of our being, and if we practice deep looking into these five elements, we will discover the true nature of our being. We will discover the true nature of our suffering, of our happiness, of our peace, of our fearlessness. The Buddha gave us very concrete ways to be able to come back to our own territory, in order to be able to look deeply, observe, embrace and understand these things, and to transform them. In our daily lives we have the habit of neglecting and running away from this territory of the five skandhas. We always want to run away from ourselves, from our territory. That is because we have the feeling that if we come back to our territory, we will have to face the suffering that is there.

Each one of us is a king or a queen, reigning over the territory of the five skandhas, but we are not responsible kings or queens-we have abandoned our territory. We have tried to run away from our territory every day. That is because we have allowed things to get worse. We have allowed war to happen, we have allowed conflicts and disorder to arise in our territory. In the past we did not practice, we did not take care of our territory. That is why there are so many conflicts, so much disorder and suffering in our territory. We have the feeling that if we were to go back to our territory, we would have to face so many difficulties, so many problems. Our daily practice, therefore, is to run away from this territory. Every time we have one or two hours, fifteen minutes, we don't use this time to come back to ourselves in order to restore some harmony and well being in our territory. We try to forget about our territory. We use the television, newspapers, music, conversation, the telephone, in

order to run away from the reality of our five skandhas. I'm suffering too much. I have too many problems. I don't want to go back to them any more. That is the situation of so many of us.

The Buddha looks at us with a great deal of understanding and compassion, and he says, "My dear child, you have to go back to these things, and put things in order there." And how does the Buddha tell us to do this? We have to cultivate the energy of right mindfulness, and doing that we will have the strength to go back to ourselves. Right mindfulness is something concrete. When we practice walking meditation, making steps in mindfulness, establishing ourselves in the present moment, when we are surrounded by the Sangha, and we practice mindful walking, we can make solid steps, peaceful steps, which will bring us back to the present moment. Each step will be able to bring about the energy of mindfulness. When we are seated, and we are following our breathing, breathing deeply, mindfully, aware of in-breath, aware of out-breath, we also cultivate the energy of mindfulness. When we are sitting with the Sangha to have a meal in mindfulness, we invest all our being in the present moment, and we eat, being aware of our food and our community of practice. We cultivate the energy of mindfulness, and a few days practicing like that can increase the energy of mindfulness in you, and that will help you, protect you, and give you courage in order to go back to yourself, to see what is there, and embrace what is there in the territory of the five skandhas.

There are feelings, painful feelings; there are emotions, strong emotions; there are perceptions which trouble us, which agitate us. We have to go back to all these things, and offer our real presence to all these things, and be able to embrace them all. "Darling, I am here for you; I have come back; I am going to take care of you." This is what we do with all our emotions, all our feelings and all our perceptions. There are perceptions which trouble us, which make us afraid. There are strong emotions which can trouble us, but if we are armed with the energy of mindfulness, we can return to them.

What is the energy of mindfulness? It is the energy of the Buddha. A Buddha is someone who is made of mindfulness, and mindfulness is something which can be cultivated. In a practice center, that is what we are doing. We are cultivating the energy of mindfulness while we walk, while we breathe, while we eat, while we work. When we are in the kitchen, we practice mindfulness as we work. When we are in the meditation hall we practice mindfulness as we sit and breathe. When we are washing our clothes, it is an opportunity to cultivate the energy of mindfulness. We do all these things with the support and the help of the whole community. One day, two days, ten days in a practice center, that is the time for cultivating the energy of mindfulness which will protect you, and make you strong, so that you can embrace what is there in you.

(Bell)

In the *Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*, the Buddha gives us very concrete exercises to take care of all that is in the territory of the five skandhas. I have translated this sutra. It is available in French (and in English) with commentaries, and with suggestions for practice and exercises. The first four exercises are to take care of our body, our physical body, which also suffers. This little book is available, please use it in order to begin your practice with mindful breathing. "Breathing in, I am aware that this is an in-breath. Breathing out, I am aware that this is an out-breath." This is the first exercise of mindful breathing. It is the first step we make when we come back to ourselves. The first thing you touch when you come back to yourself is your breathing. "Breathing in, I know this is an in-breath; breathing out, I know this is an out-breath." This is the correct approach.

With the energy of mindfulness we embrace our breathing, our in-breath. "I breathe in, and I know the in-breath is here; I know you are there, out-breath." This is the way to embrace, to love, to recognize, to make peace, to reconcile. Make peace with your breathing first of all, that is what the Buddha suggests, and it is very pleasant to do. Just breathe mindfully. It is nourishing and healing. You have lungs, you have a nose, and you have the ability to breathe, to breathe in and to breathe out. The air is good, or good enough, and therefore this practice is a pleasant experience. And the Buddha recommends that we do this practice. He says that the Dharma is lovely in the beginning, lovely in the middle, and lovely at the end. It means that meditation must not be a hard labor. Meditation should be something pleasant. Whether it's walking or sitting, everything should be pleasant, an enjoyable experience.

Last week we began with four breathings offered to us by the Buddha: "I breathe in, I breathe out" is the first exercise; "in, out." The second exercise, "I breathe in and I am aware and I am aware of the whole length of my in-breath; I breathe out, and I am aware of the whole length of my out-breath." That is the practice of following our breathing. The first exercise is to identify the in-breath as an in-breath, and the out-breath as an out-breath. The second exercise is to follow the in-breath and the out-breath for all its length. The third exercise: "Breathing in, I am aware of my whole physical body." Now we have really come back to the first element of our personality, our body. With the energy of our mindfulness, we have come back and we have embraced our whole physical body. "Breathing in, I am aware of my whole physical body; breathing out, I smile to my physical body." This is a practice of love, a practice of reconciliation. First of all, with your breathing, and then with your physical body, the whole of your body. It's a very methodical way of doing things. In the sitting position, in the lying position, embrace your physical body tenderly, with the energy of mindfulness, and the conscious breathing will continue to give rise to the energy of mindfulness. If you continue to breathe mindfully like this, the energy of mindfulness will continue to be generated, and you will have something to help you embrace your physical body.

There is suffering in your physical body. There is war and disorder in your physical body, therefore you need to return to this body, to embrace it, and with mindful breathing you will pacify the war and the trouble in your body. The fourth exercise: "I breathe in, and I make the activities of my physical body calm." There has been stress, pain, and disharmony in my physical body, and now I am conscious of this pain, and with my in-breath and my out-breath I embrace this physical body and I begin to pacify the suffering of my body. Do you see how compassionate the Buddha is when he gives us this teaching? The first four breathings are all directed to your body, to recognize your body, to embrace your body, and lessen the suffering of your body, to alleviate the suffering of your body.

The next four exercises are directed to feelings. You have embraced your physical body, you have made a reconciliation with

your physical body, you have calmed the pain in your physical body; now, you have to go more deeply into the house of your being, and what you find are the feelings. There is a river of feelings flowing day and night in us, and each drop of water in that river is a feeling. A feeling is born like that, and remains for a time, and disappears. And other feelings are born, remain and disappear: a river of sensations which flows day and night. Now you have come back, and sitting on the bank of the river you contemplate, you embrace, you recognize each feeling. This is what the Buddha has told us to do, and it corresponds exactly to the method which I gave you yesterday morning. It means you should try to be in touch with positive things first of all--things that are going well in you--you should recognize them, you should identify them, you should touch them.

"Breathing in, I feel joy in myself. Breathing out, I smile to the joy in myself." This is the fifth exercise: touching joy. And the sixth is happiness. There is a difference between joy and happiness in Buddhism. In Pali the word for joy is *pīti*, and the word for happiness is *sukha*. Joy is something which is born when we recognize what is beautiful and in good condition, and we recognize what brings us good news. Imagine that we are travelers in the desert, and we are thirsty, we are suffering, and suddenly we notice an oasis, and we can see cool water. Seeing this water makes us feel happy. We haven't drunk the water yet, but just seeing the water is enough to make us happy. And when we arrive in the oasis and we begin to drink the water, then we have happiness. Joy is different from happiness. In the joy there is still some excitement, but in happiness there is little or no excitement. You are blessed by happiness. That which brings about happiness and joy is concentration, and distancing, leaving behind, abandoning.

Abandoning and concentration are what bring about joy and happiness. Abandoning means "leaving behind." Joy is something possible when we can leave certain things behind. And the ability to leave things behind has to be practiced. Imagine that you have been in Paris for several weeks, and you have suffered from the noise and the pollution, and other things like that, which can be found in all big cities. Now you have the opportunity to leave Paris, you take your car, and you leave the city. And when you begin to see hills and fields, you feel great joy. You have been able to leave the city behind. If you had not been able to leave the city behind, you would not have felt this joy. This joy is the freedom of entering the countryside. In our daily lives there are things which cling to you and make you suffer, and you say, "If only I could disassociate myself from these things, then I would be happy." There are things we can disassociate ourselves from every day, to make us happy. These things are not useful for us, these are things which encumber us, which take away space and freedom from us, and take away our joy. In spite of this, we have allowed these things to cling to us. It's a foolish thing, but everybody does it. Therefore we have to learn how to rid ourselves of these things, and that is called "leaving behind," and the happiness of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and those amongst us who are free, comes from leaving behind. That is what the Buddha has taught.

If you can learn how to leave behind and cultivate freedom, you will have happiness. Are you brave enough to do this? Your courage will come from your deep looking. If you understand, you will see that these things which cling to you have always made you suffer, and therefore you will have the courage to let them go. These may be relationships which make you suffer, which pull you down--you have to be intelligent. You are intelligent, but you haven't had enough time to look deeply, and therefore you haven't had enough courage to let go. Letting go will be happiness.

Before you left the city to come to Plum Village, you had to make an effort, you had to make a decision. Leaving everything behind to come to Plum Village demands some courage, is that not so? And when you come to Plum Village, you feel happy, you feel free of the things you left behind. You can walk as a free person, without thinking about arriving. You can arrive in every step. That is a new way of living. You no longer feel tied to the future. You can taste what life is like in the here and now, and the joy of this is possible only when you have the courage to let go, to leave behind. In the Chinese it is described as the joy which is born from leaving behind, the happiness born from concentration.

Concentration gives us much happiness also. Without concentration, there is no happiness. If you cannot concentrate, you cannot touch the blue sky deeply. The blue sky is something wonderful. The sun rising, the sun setting, the beautiful face of your child, all these things ask for concentration. When you are concentrated, you can touch more deeply, you can recognize the presence of the child, of the sky. All is there, nature is there. These wonderful things are there, available to us. Therefore, concentration allows us to be there in the here and the now in order to be able to enter into deep contact with all that is beautiful, all that is refreshing, all that is healing, which is all that is available in the here and the now. Without concentration, we will continue to turn and turn around, to run around, and there will be no depth in daily life. But with concentration, you can learn to live each moment of your daily life deeply.

If you have half an hour, you can use that half-hour to eat an orange. Much happiness can come from eating an orange, if you know how to do it with letting go, leaving behind, and concentration. The orange is in your left hand. You look at it. An orange is something very wonderful, a true miracle. The orange tree spent months in making this orange, with the help of the sun, the wind, and the rain. Do we not have time to touch this miracle, this wonderful thing called an orange? Do you have the freedom to be able to be there for the orange for half an hour? Can you leave behind all your worries, all your anguish, all your anger, and your plans? If you can, you will be a free person, and that is what is meant by leaving behind. You rid yourself of all these things in order to be able to become a free person, in order to be able to be there with the orange. Look, and you will penetrate deeply the reality of the orange.

Once I was in the United States with a group of friends, and somebody gave us some oranges, so we had an "orange meditation," and it took us an hour. We spent an hour with the orange, and it was a very happy time. I instructed people in how to eat an orange in mindfulness. With leaving behind, you can liberate yourself, and you can enter into deep contact with this wonderful thing that we call an orange. And with our concentration we can live deeply this wonderful moment: we are really there, and the orange is also really there. If you are not really there, the orange is only an illusion. Therefore, the practice is to make yourself real.

In this hour of practice with the orange, happiness is real, and that happiness nourishes us, heals us, and brings about transformation in us. The procedure of transformation is pleasant. It is not a hard labor, this leaving behind, this concentrating,

is a joy and a happiness. To be on your cushion, or walking with the Sangha, or being together, touching the earth deeply, this always makes us happy. And what is the orange, what does it represent? It represents life, the wonders of life, and when you are not there with the orange, you will not be with your child, and your child is a miracle of life also. Or your friend, or the tree in the garden-they are also miracles of life. Without leaving behind, without concentration, there will not be joy, there will not be happiness. Joy and happiness are available to us; it depends on us and on our freedom, so free yourself. And conscious breathing is the beginning of freedom.

See the Buddha: he is a cook; he gives us good food, which is able to heal and nourish us. There is so much compassion in his way of teaching. "Breathing in, I feel joy; breathing out, I feel joy..." with these two aspects, leaving behind and concentration.

Seventh exercise: "Breathing in, I am aware of my feeling." It may be an unpleasant feeling, a painful feeling that you have within. This breathing is to recognize that we have this pain. This pain has been waiting for us, and now we have come back home to it. And we say to it, "My dear, I am here for you." And like a mother, with a lot of tenderness and compassion, you take the child in your arms, and that is how you breathe in and breathe out, embracing the feeling of pain that is in you. "My dear, I am here for you. Breathing in I am aware of the feeling, breathing out I calm the feeling."

The eighth breathing is calming the feeling. "Breathing in, I calm my feeling, breathing out, I calm my feeling." You don't have to do anything. All you do is embrace, hold your suffering in your arms, and your "arms" here means the energy of your mindfulness. Pain is an area of energy, and it means the energies blocked. Mindfulness is also a source of energy, which envelops, surrounds the painful energy, and transforms it. So if you are able to look at, to read, to study the teaching of the Buddha on mindful breathing, you will see that that first eight breathings are to take care of your body and your feelings. The other breathings will allow us to embrace our mental formations, our perceptions, and our consciousness, in order to transform them and to understand them, in order to restore harmony and peace, which is possible in us, as in the case of the wave.

The wave is also the water. If you take away the wave, there won't be any water. The water can be the wave, and the water can also be calm. When the water is calm, it can reflect things as they are. Therefore peace is possible; peace, happiness, solidity, freedom...all these things are possible. Although there is suffering in the five skandhas, if we know how to deal with these things, how to take care of these five elements, we can give rise to peace, fearlessness, stability and happiness in ourselves. We will continue this the day after tomorrow.

(Three bells)

(End of talk)

# Taking Good Care of Our Habit Energies\*

Dear friends,

Welcome to the Summer Opening in Plum Village. Who is three years old? Who is less than three years old? I would like to introduce to you Bao-tich who is four years old. He just celebrated his birthday two days ago. Here is Bao-tich. This is his second year in Plum Village to practice. Can you turn around? He came last year and he practiced very well. He was so happy, so this year he came again. Bao-tich is his name. It means the store of jewels. I am very happy that he is here. He has a great time being in Plum Village. He came about ten days ago and I had the opportunity to drink tea with him and to play with him. I am very happy when I am surrounded by young people. They look like flowers to me, very fresh, very innocent, and I wish that the young people will stay with us for the whole retreat, thirty days.

This year we will also practice pebble meditation, but instead of having five pebbles we have six. Each person may like to make a small bag like this. You are free to choose the color you like. I also have a bag of this color and inside I keep six pebbles. They are all here, six pebbles, one, two, three, four, five, six. In the other bag I have also six. They are bigger, like this. After having picked them up outside, I used soap to wash them carefully, and I dry them. Then I put them into a bag like this.

I think today you may like to make your own pebble bag. You go and pick up six beautiful pebbles, you wash them, you dry them, and you put them in your small bag, to practice pebble meditation. I think the grown-up people, if they want, they are welcome to do the same, pebble meditation. We will give a name to each pebble, a specific name to the pebble, and you may like to inscribe the name on each pebble also. Because this summer we are going to learn about the practice of the six *paramitas*, the six ways of crossing over to the other shore.

There is this shore of the river and there is the other shore of the river. When you are unhappy, you are on this shore, and you don't want to stay on this shore, you want to cross over to the other shore, the shore of happiness. When you are not peaceful, you are agitated; you are on this shore. You don't want to stay on this shore; it's not very pleasant to be agitated, so you want to cross over to the other shore, the shore of peace.

Suppose you are overwhelmed with anger and hatred. You don't like it because anger and hatred make you suffer. You don't want to stay there on the shore of anger and hatred, the shore of suffering, so you would like to cross over to the other shore, the shore of nonhatred, of compassion, of love. We are going to learn together how to

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\* Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 16, 1997 in Plum Village, France.

practice this kind of crossing. Don't believe that we need many years or months to cross to the other shore. Sometimes we need only a few minutes, or even a few seconds, to cross from one shore to the other shore. The six paramitas will be represented by the six pebbles. Each pebble will bear the name of one paramita. Paramita means crossing over to the other shore.

I'd like to teach you how to practice with the bell, because it is very important to practice with the bell, very pleasant also. There are all sorts of bells, and this is about the smallest kind of bell. This bell also has a cushion to sit on. This is a mini-bell. If you look at the bell, you see that it has also a cushion under it. So a practitioner may like to learn how to invite the bell to sound, because when we hear the sound of the bell we can also cross to the other shore. When you are angry, when you are sad, when you are agitated you are on this shore, but if you hear the sound of the bell, and if you know how to practice listening to the bell, then very quickly you can overcome your anger, your agitation. You cross over to the other shore, and suddenly you feel peaceful and happy. You need only to listen to the bell and breathe in and out a few times to find yourself on the other shore, the shore of peace, which is more pleasant. Every one of us can learn, it is very easy.

You may like to keep the bell on its cushion like this in order to invite the bell to sound. We don't say hitting the bell, because that word is not nice, or striking the bell. But we say invite the bell to sound. "Bell, my dear bell, may I invite you to sound." That's very nice. The bell becomes a kind of friend. So with your left hand you hold the bell like this and with your right hand you hold the bell inviter. You may call it a stick, but here we call it the bell inviter. And we say "the bell is invited" or "you invite the bell."

There are many of us who don't need the cushion. We put the bell directly on the palm of our hand, and by doing so we notice the sound will be more beautiful. You ask why? Because when we put the bell on the cushion, quite a large surface of the bell is touched by the cushion. The sound is all right, but if you put it without the cushion, the sound will be better. Suppose I hold the bell like this. The bell is not very free, that is why the sound of the bell isn't beautiful. See:

[Bell]

When the bell is free, the sound of the bell will be more beautiful. That is why in Plum Village, we like to put the bell like this on our hand in order for the bell to be as free as possible. When we invite the bell the sound will be beautiful. Before you invite the bell to sound, you have to bow to the bell first. Why do we have to bow to the bell? Maybe people will say that it's strange, why is this person bowing to a bell? It's queer. You may just look at the bell and say "Hello bell," that's all right too. Bowing to the bell is a way of greeting a bell. You can greet the bell with a smile. You can greet the bell with a few words: "Hello there, my little bell, my darling little bell." You can greet the bell in

several ways. There are people who would like to greet the bell by bowing like this, so it's up to you to choose.

So when you hold the stick, the bell inviter, you have to practice breathing in and breathing out three times, so that you become a real bell master. A real bell master is someone who is concentrated. The body and the mind together, and that is our practice. So even before we invite the bell to sound, we become already calmer and happier. You may like to breathe in and pay attention to your in-breath and breathe out and pay attention to your out-breath. You breathe in and breathe out like that three times. Now you have become concentrated, you have become a bell master. When you know that you are a bell master, you can begin to invite the bell.

I think today everyone has to practice, no matter how young you are. We should learn how to invite the bell. This is very important. To invite the bell you have to wake the bell up, like this. [Muffled bell] This is the waking up sound. Why do we have to wake the sound of the bell up first? Because we don't want the bell to be caught by surprise. We don't want the people around us to be caught by surprise. We want to warn people that a big sound of the bell will be heard. That is why we begin by waking up the bell like this. [Muffled bell] Everyone knows that they will hear a real sound of the bell in just a few seconds. So you prepare people. You give people the opportunity to stop thinking, to stop talking, to prepare themselves for receiving the sound of the bell. So you allow them about five or six seconds, or even more like this. [Muffled a bell] Then you invite the bell.

[Bell]

So we distinguish between the two sounds, the first is the waking up sound, and the second is the full sound, remember? To produce the waking up sound you have to keep the inviter like this. [Muffled bell] You don't take it off, like this. [Bell] You breathe in. Everyone knows that a full sound is going to be heard, so everyone stops thinking and begins to smile to receive the sound of the bell. When the full sound is heard, you practice breathing in and you recite a short poem.

"I listen, I listen," that's when you breathe in. And when you breathe out, "This wonder sound brings me back to my true home." My true home is in here, where I can find peace and stability and joy. So we have to learn by heart this short poem:

Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home.

"Listen, listen," that is for your in-breath. "This wonderful sound brings me back to my true home," that is for your out-breath. You breathe in and breathe out three times like that before you invite the second sound. Everyone in the hall will be practicing with you, and enjoying breathing in, breathing out and listening to the bell. After having



practice three sounds like that, you become much better, you are calmer, you are more stable, you are more joyful. That is the practice of calming.

I think I am going to lend you this bell, the young people, and you have time to practice this morning and this afternoon, also. I have a few. I would recommend that before you practice inviting the bell, you look at the bell, you bow to the bell, and you say "Hello bell." You pick it up and you put it in on your left hand like this. You raise your hand to the level of your eyes. This is a very beautiful movement. You look at the bell like that. You breathe in, breathe out, and you smile three times. You know in Plum Village we have a beautiful poem to recite silently when we look at the bell and breathe in and breathe out. This poem is like this:

*Body, speech and mind in perfect oneness  
I send my heart along with the sound of this bell.  
May the hearers awaken from forgetfulness  
And transcend the path of anxiety and sorrow.*

All of us know it by heart. The poem is available in Vietnamese, in French, in English, in German, and so on. You can learn it. Every time I breathe I read silently one line and when I breathe out I read the second line and so on. I repeat:

*Body, speech and mind in perfect oneness  
I send my heart along with the sound of this bell.  
May the hearers awaken from forgetfulness  
And transcend the path of anxiety and sorrow.*

After you have breathed in and out like that you become calm, you become a bell master. You can begin to invite the bell. Shall we try to practice together? You will breathe and I will read the *gatha*, the poem for you.

*Body, speech and mind in perfect oneness  
I send my heart along with the sound of this bell.  
May the hearers awaken from forgetfulness  
And transcend the path of anxiety and sorrow.*

Now I am waking up the bell.

[Muffled bell]

Now I am inviting the bell.

[Bell]

Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Now I invite the second sound.

[Bell]

Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Now I invite the third sound.

[Bell]

Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home.

I have completed three sounds and I have breathed in and breathed out nine times. I slowly lower the bell and I put it on the cushion. I bow to it again. I have accomplished the task of being your bell master. This is for the small bell, for the big bell it is a little bit different, but we will learn later.

What is the purpose of practicing the bell? Practicing the bell is one of the ways to help us cross to the other shore. When you are angry, when you are unhappy, when you are agitated, you don't like to be on the shore of anger, agitation and unhappiness. So you invite the bell to bring your body and your mind together, to get still, to get calm, to get peaceful. And while you practice breathing in and out and listening to the bell, you are crossing the river of suffering. You go to the other shore, the shore of peace and of happiness.

It is my hope that in every home we have a bell, so that you can practice crossing to the other shore together as a family. In Plum Village we practice also when we hear the telephone ringing. If you observe, you see that every time the telephone rings, the brothers and sisters in Plum Village practice breathing in and out, calming and smiling exactly like when they hear the bell. So the telephone sound becomes a kind of bell for us. We also practice with other sounds as well. When the clock, every hour or every quarter of the hour, plays the music, the monks, the nuns, and other people in Plum Village, they stop talking, they stop thinking and they go back to their breathing. They practice mindful breathing, and they feel calm, they feel happy. They are close to the shore of happiness and peace. I think there will be brothers and sisters that will help you to learn how to practice the bell today. I hope that after tomorrow you will be able to do it. This is the end of the dharma talk for young people. When you hear the bell please stand up and bow to the sangha before you go out and learn more about the practice.

[Bell]

My dear friends, we have several kinds of energies within ourselves. There are positive energies that we should cultivate, and there are negative energies that we should be able to transform. We have habits. We have good habits and we have bad habits, and the practice of Buddhist meditation is to recognize our habits, in the form of energies, and to transform them or nourish them. When you hear the telephone ring, or when you hear the sound of the bell, if you have the habit of the practice, you need no one to remind you. You just stop you thinking and enjoy breathing in and out. This is a good habit. In Plum Village all of us have that good habit. Every time we hear the bell. Every time we hear the clock playing the music, or the telephone ringing, we always naturally go back to our breathing, and we enjoy our in-breath and out-breath and smile. We don't make any effort because it has become a habit, a good habit. We learn to do it in a way that makes the moment pleasant.

There is no point of practicing if it is not pleasant. The practice should be pleasant. This is very important. When you practice listening to the bell, the practice should be pleasant and nourishing. Otherwise, why should we practice? The same is true with the practice of sitting, walking, eating in silence, and so on. There are many people who practice sitting meditation, walking meditation, sharing a silent meal, but not everyone enjoys the practice.

If you don't enjoy your practice, it means you are not doing it the way you should do it. The question is not to practice or not to practice. The question is to practice in such a way that you get the healing, the transformation, and the joy of the practice.

In our tradition the practice of meditation is seen as a source of nourishment. So it is very important that we make the practice pleasant, joyful and nourishing. If while sitting you suffer, then you should know that your way of sitting is not correct. If you are sharing a silent meal and you don't feel happy, it means that your way of eating is not correct. Something has to be corrected in your way of practicing, your way of looking at the practice, your way of conducting the practice. We have brothers and sisters around, we can always consult them and ask them for their experiences. They will show you. Many of us have been in the practice for a long time and we can help you to practice with more joy. We have to practice with intelligence.

[Bell]

Suppose we have the habit of walking very quickly, very fast. Suddenly, when we arrive at Plum Village, we are requested to slow down. We feel it is not pleasant. Since everyone is walking slowly, you have to slow down and you don't feel happy. So your practice is a cause for your suffering. Walk slowly, yes, but walk in such a way that it makes you happy, relaxed and calm, that is the point. We have to ask how to walk

slowly and yet not to suffer and to enjoy the walking. So it requires some understanding, some insight, some practice, to enjoy walking meditation.

You are facing a kind of habit, the habit of walking very quickly, running. That habit is rooted very deeply in our daily life. Maybe our ancestors used to walk very quickly and they have transmitted to us that way of walking. Perhaps many generations of people have believed that happiness is somewhere there in the future. We have to go there in order to be happy. Happiness is not possible right now, right here. That kind of belief, conscious or unconscious, has become very strong in us. We believe happiness is impossible here and now. That is why there is a kind of energy pushing us to run, to run all our life, searching for a time, a place, when happiness is possible.

So we understand why we get caught in that kind of habit, always running. We are determined to stop, to transform that habit, and we learn how to make steps that can allow us to touch life deeply in each moment. With that kind of learning and practice we will be able to walk more slowly and we will begin to enjoy touching the earth with our feet, combining our steps with our in-breath and out-breath. We just feel wonderful to walk like that, walking without any intention of arriving. That is new for us. We have to learn to develop the new habit. And as we get the energy of the new habit, we will enjoy walking.

So the practice is to recognize the old habit, the negative habit, the bad habit, to recognize the energy of our habits and smile to them. And also to cultivate the new habit, the good habit, until the new habit begins to produce energy. When we have the new kind of energy, we don't have to make any effort, we just enjoy listening to the bell, we just enjoy walking slowly, we just enjoy eating in silence, because we like it. We get the nourishment, the joy, of doing so. Suddenly, the practice becomes pleasant, joyful, nourishing.

It would be absurd if we followed a practice that makes us suffer. The Buddha always reminds us his Dharma, his practice, is pleasant in the beginning, in the middle, at the end. So the practice should be lovely, should be pleasant, should be joyful, whether you are sitting or walking or eating or drinking. Whether you are cooking or cleaning. Cooking and cleaning should be done in such a way that it can provide you with peace and joy and nourishment.

We know how strong, how powerful is the habit energy. We notice that there are times when we are not ourselves. We cannot be ourselves. We are carried away by our habit energy. We did not want to say that, we knew that saying that would create damage in our relationship with the other person. But finally, we said it. We knew that we should not do it. We knew that if we went ahead and did it we would create damage in our relationship. But finally, we did it. We said it was stronger than us. What is stronger? The habit energy. So we felt helpless, powerless. We felt very weak that we cannot cope

with it. It is so strong, our habit energy. And after having said it, after having done it, we regret it. We feel sorry. We condemn ourselves. Sometimes we make a strong vow that next time we will not do it again. We will not say it again. But next time, we do it again, we say it again. The habit energy is very strong. That is why we have to be able to practice, to learn ways of handling that habit energy in order to transform it.

The Buddha did not recommend fighting against your habit energy. He recommended the practice of recognizing these habits. The practice of recognizing, if we take it up in our daily practice, will become another kind of habit, a good habit. You are able to recognize everything that is happening within yourself, including the habit energy that you consider to be stronger than you. Recognizing like that does not mean that you have to suffer because you have that habit, because that habit may not have been learned during your lifetime. It may be a kind of habit energy transmitted by several generations of your ancestors and you just received it. You have to recognize that it is there and try to transform it for yourself, for your parents, and for your ancestors.

About ten years ago I toured in several states of India to offer retreats and Dharma talks to the communities of the Ambedkar society consisting of the former untouchables. A friend there helped arrange my tour. One day I was sitting with him in a bus. I was enjoying very much the landscape outside. I was very happy to be in India, to offer retreats and Dharma talks and to enjoy the people and landscape there. When I looked over at him, he was sitting on my right, he was not relaxed. He was very tight. He had the habit energy to worry too much. I knew that he was trying his best to make my trip pleasant, so I told him, "My dear friend, I know you are trying very hard to make my visit pleasant, but I would like to tell you that I am very happy right now, it is very pleasant to sit here, I enjoy it very much, why don't you sit back and enjoy yourself, also. There is nothing to worry about now." He said, "OK" and he sat back. I continued to enjoy the palm trees and other things outside and just a few minutes later I turned around and looked and he was just like before, very tight, very rigid.

I know it is not easy. When you belong to a caste discriminated against for four thousand, five thousand years, you have to struggle day and night. The habit to struggle day and night was there deep in him. It had been transmitted by several generations of ancestors. There he is with his strong habit energy, struggling day and night, not being able to relax for a second, for a minute. Of course we can help him to relax, to understand that there is nothing to worry about, that it is possible for us to enjoy life in the present moment. He is perfectly capable of understanding this and practicing this, but it does not last. Just for a few seconds and he allows himself to be caught again by that very strong habit energy. So there is no point of blaming yourself because you have that habit energy. You know that that habit energy is not something you created for yourself, it has been transmitted. You recognize your ancestors who have suffered. You know that now you have an opportunity to transform that energy for yourself, for your ancestors, and for your children and their children.

Also about ten years ago there was a young gentleman who came from North America to the Upper Hamlet for the practice and he stayed two, three weeks in the Upper Hamlet, very happy. He was surrounded by brothers and sisters who always practiced walking meditation, sitting meditation, working in the kitchen with mindfulness, and so on. One day he was asked by friends to go to the market in St. Foy La Grande to do some shopping, because it was Thanksgiving Day and everyone was asked to make a dish, to cook something special of their country, to offer to our ancestors. The Chinese would cook a Chinese dish, the Dutch would offer a Dutch plate, and so on. He was making something with the other Americans so he went to St. Foy La Grande and shopped.

While shopping he noticed that he became agitated, that he was getting in a hurried mood. He was surprised, because during his three-week stay in Plum Village he never behaved like that. He was surrounded by the sangha, he was always mindful and peaceful. The energy of the sangha helped him stay mindful and peaceful, but here he was alone. Suddenly without the sangha around that old habit energy emerged. Because he had practiced for three weeks already, he also had another kind of energy, the energy of mindfulness. He was able to recognize the coming up of the old habit. He also saw that he inherited that habit from his mother, because his mother was always like that, always in a hurry.

So he breathed in and he said, "Hello Mommy." Suddenly the habit energy was no longer there. When you recognize it, that energy will lose its power over you. It will go back into the depth of your consciousness, into your body, waiting for appropriate circumstances to manifest again. He just breathed in and said, "Hello Mommy" recognizing the habit as it was. "My mother is always like that." So he was free from the habit during the practice of breathing in and breathing out. He knew that without the sangha around he was still weak and he tried to follow his breathing mindfully. He finished his shopping and came back and told us the story.

You can recognize the habit energy because you have the energy of mindfulness, a kind of energy within you that does the work of recognition. Mindfulness is the energy that can recognize what is there in the present moment. When you drink, you know that you are drinking. When you breathe in and you know that you are breathing in, the energy of mindfulness is there. We call it mindfulness of breathing, *Anapanasati*. When you walk, and you know that you are walking, mindfulness is there. It is called mindfulness of walking. When you eat and you know that you are eating, that you are chewing, then mindfulness is there, we call it mindfulness of eating.

We try to be mindful in every act we do, in every moment of our daily life, and that is the best way to cultivate the second kind of energy, the energy of mindfulness.

If you practice walking mindfully, breathing mindfully, sitting mindfully, doing things mindfully, you cultivate the kind of energy called mindfulness. Only with that energy can you recognize the old habits and prevent them from pushing you to do things that you don't want to do, to say things that you don't want to say. So cultivating the energy of mindfulness is the heart of our practice. That is why our friends are requested to practice walking mindfully, breathing mindfully, and eating mindfully. From your tent to the meditation hall, you are requested to walk mindfully.

Every step must be mindful. You may like to coordinate your steps with your in-breath. When you breathe in, you know you are breathing in, mindfulness of breathing. When you make a step, you know that you are making a step, mindfulness of walking. You can combine the two. Breathing in you make two steps or three steps, breathing out you make two steps or three steps. You don't need to arrive in the meditation hall to practice meditation. You begin already from your tent. And you may begin even before that.

When you hear the bell announcing sitting meditation, the sound brings you back to your true home, already. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. There you are in your tent, but you are already in the meditation hall. Every one of us in our tent, in our room, we are listening to the bell. We are practicing breathing in calmly, breathing out smiling. We are practicing together as a sangha. After having practiced with the bell, we begin to walk in the direction of the meditation hall. Everyone is doing it at the same time, so the meditation hall is everywhere, should be everywhere, even in private, in the shower room.

If you practice like that one week, two weeks, three weeks, you'll be like our friend going to the market of St. Foy La Grande, shopping and having the capacity to recognize the habit energy when it emerges. Recognize it as it is, smile to it, and do not fight it, you don't need to fight it. You don't need to feel ashamed of it. It's like when you do the work of gardening. There are fresh vegetables, there are flowers, but there is also garbage. We know that vegetables or garbage, they are all organic. Flowers sometime have to turn themselves into garbage. And garbage, if you know how to take care of it, will be transformed into flowers again. Both flowers and garbage are organic matter. We don't discriminate against the garbage, because we know that with the garbage we can make flowers again. So the bad habits, the negative energies in us, you don't have to throw them away. You may like to make use of them to feed your good habits.

So the practice of meditation does not mean that you draw a line of discrimination between the positive energy, what you call goodness, and the negative energy, what you call evil. That is not the way. That is discrimination. That is not the insight that you should use. The insight is interbeing. You look at both as organic. This is because that is. That is because this is. So with the garbage you can make the flowers and the flowers are to become garbage later on.

The process of gardening is the process of continued transformation. We recognize the flowers in us; we recognize also the garbage in us. We do not have to discriminate. If it is a flower, we recognize it as a flower. "Hello, flower." If it is a piece of garbage, we say "Hello garbage." No discrimination. No fear. The only thing is to learn how to practice gardening. You are an organic gardener. You know how to take care of your bad habit energies, to transform them into the good ones. We don't imagine that after having eliminated all the negative things we only have the positive things, because the positives feed on the negative and vice versa. So that is the insight of nonduality. It is so important in the teaching of Buddhist meditation. The insight of interbeing: garbage and flowers inter-are.

So when you have learned how to accept the negative things in you, you already have peace. I don't mind that there are negative things in me. I accept them. I have learned a way to take care of my negative things. I also have learned a way to take care of my positive things, to keep them alive longer. I have learned how to transform the negative things, in order to nourish the positive things. All of that can be done only if you have the energy of mindfulness. That is why our practice here is to learn how to eat mindfully and joyfully, how to walk mindfully and joyfully, how to breathe mindfully and joyfully. The "mindfully" should go together with the "joyfully." While sitting together and eating in silence there are a number of people who are very happy, just to sit there and share a meal with the sangha, It can make many people very happy. Because eating is a very deep practice, it's like when you practice sitting, or walking, or washing you clothes. Your practice may be very deep if the energy of mindfulness is strong during the practice.

[Bell]

We know what the negative habit energies have done to us and our beloved ones. We know that we have to take good care of our habit energies and to transform them. That is why we are determined to cultivate the energy of mindfulness in order to recognize that habit energy every time it tries to come up. This is very important. Therefore, during the time together here we do everything with the purpose of cultivating that energy. That is why we don't spend our time talking a lot, or thinking a lot, or reading a lot, or studying a lot. We use our time here in order to just practice mindfulness. Mindfulness everywhere, mindfulness every time. Walking, we only walk mindfully. Eating, we only eat mindfully. We try to do everything mindfully, because we want to have enough of that energy to be able to recognize our habit energy. Because we know that once we are able to recognize the habit energy, the habit energy will not overwhelm us again. Every time the habit energy is recognized it will lose some of its strength. And the next time when it comes up again we do the recognition again. That is the only way to diminish its power. By doing so we use that energy to feed the new habit energy, the positive habit energy.



We should be able to recognize that around us there are refreshing, beautiful, and healing things, and inside us there are refreshing, healing and wonderful things. The wonders of life are everywhere, within us and around us. Cultivating the habit of recognizing them, touching them is very important. The sky may be very blue, very clear, and very beautiful, but if you are caught in your sorrow, caught in your anger, you cannot touch the blue sky. The children are fresh, lovely, but you have no capacity of being with them, of recognizing them as the miracles around us. We imprison ourselves in our sorrows, our worries, our fears. We are not capable of touching the beauties, the wonders of life around us, and even inside of us. So we have to practice to learn the new habit of touching these wonders of life.

To be alive, to be still alive, is a miracle. To be able to walk with other people on this beautiful planet, it's a wonderful thing. Remember when you were very sick, unable to breathe, you could not enjoy your breathing. You had a fever, and you had no strength to go out of your room. Your strength had left you. Your desire was to be able to get up and to go into the garden and just walk in the garden, but you could not do it. So having strong feet, being able to walk, having eyes still in good condition that allow us to contemplate the sky, the clouds, the luxurious vegetation, to look at the people, the children; it's a wonderful thing. But we had that bad energy, that negative energy, of neglecting these kinds of things; we only tried to focus on our suffering, our problems. So we had to learn to cultivate that new energy, to recognize and to touch the positive things. Because we need the nourishment, the healing. If we cannot touch the healing and refreshing elements around us and in us, we cannot get the healing and nourishment. Therefore cultivating the energy of mindfulness to recognize what is there, wonderful, refreshing, healing, is very important.

A pebble, a cloud, a flower, all are wonderful, all are mysteries. It would be a pity if we cannot be with a leaf, with a flower, with a cloud, with a stream of water, only imprison ourselves in our sorrow and fear. So recognizing the habit energy, recognizing our fear, our sorrow.

Yes, that is our practice. But to recognize the sky as it is, to recognize the fact that you are alive, that you are walking, that there are living beings around you, that you have eyes that can look at things, you have fingers that can touch things, is equally important. The practice is simple and you have the sangha around you. Everyone is trying to do the same, living each moment of our daily life deeply, trying to dwell in, to establish ourselves in the present moment. Not to run, because running is a strong habit energy, running to the future, or running to the past. That is why the Buddha made it clear that the past is already gone and the future is not yet there. There is only one moment when life is available; that is the present moment. Your appointment with life is in the present moment. If you are not able to touch the present moment, you miss your appointment with life. All these things are very simple, and not difficult to understand at all. Therefore, all our energies and time should be used to put it into practice.

Let us together practice mindfulness in our daily life. Let us learn how to go back to the present moment, to live deeply every moment of our daily life. Because in that present moment you will find the most beautiful things, what we are looking for: peace, joy, stability, love, the kingdom of God, the pure land. All these things can be touched and found only in the present moment.

So learning how to go back to the present moment and to live deeply in that moment is the kind of new habit energy that you have to cultivate, and as a sangha we do it together. You are requested to practice listening to the bell, but when there is no bell you may like to practice listening to the birds, mindfully. Because every sound can help you go back to the present moment and to practice. Every sight, also, can serve as a mindfulness bell. When you see a brother, a sister walking mindfully, a monk or a nun walking mindfully, that is another mindfulness bell, you go back to yourself, you enjoy breathing in, breathing out, you touch yourself, you touch life, you touch the world deeply in that moment. To meditate means to be alive, to live deeply that moment. That is why we practice Noble Silence. When we wake we begin to walk, begin to arrange things in mindfulness, we follow our breathing, we listen to the bell mindfully, we go to the meditation hall mindfully, we enjoy the minutes of sitting, of walking, of chanting mindfully, we enjoy our breakfast mindfully. Everything is for practice. Eating your breakfast is the practice.

Allow yourself to be penetrated by the collective energy of the sangha. Offer your energy of mindfulness to the sangha. When you practice mindful breathing and walking you emit the energy of mindfulness from you. And everyone is practicing and emitting the energy of mindfulness. That is why being in sangha we can allow ourselves to be penetrated by that kind of energy of mindfulness. It will be transforming and healing to us. So we receive the energy of the sangha and we participate and contribute to that collective energy. That is why practicing in a sangha is much more pleasant and easier than when you practice alone. Practicing together, walking, breathing, sitting, doing things, we offer each other the energy of mindfulness.

After the retreat we can continue to cultivate that energy at home. We may like to set up a sangha in your area to continue your practice. Because according to this practice the energy of mindfulness is the only kind of energy that can help change our life. Bring back the joy of life, bring back love, understanding, and transform the old habit energies that have been causing us and the people we love a lot of suffering. In dharma discussions let us not be theoretical, let us be very practical, let us exchange the experiences of our practice: how to dwell firmly in the present moment and how to live deeply each moment of our life. How to encounter life deeply in order for us to look deeply and get the kind of insights that will be able to liberate us from our anger, our fear and our suffering.

After this dharma talk we shall gather outside for a short walking meditation and we will gather around the big bell tower for some chanting.

[Bell]

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on April 5, 1998

in Plum Village, France.

## *The Sutra on Knowing the Better Way to Live Alone*

Dear Sangha, today is the fifth of April 1998. We are in the Upper Hamlet, in Spring Retreat. Now we have come to the liturgy for Thursday morning. It includes the Sutra on Knowing the Better Way to Live Alone, and the Sutra on the Forty Verses or Ratnagunasamcaya. The Sutra on Knowing the Better Way to Live Alone is called the Bhaddekaratta Sutta in Pali. It belongs to the Majjhima Nikaya 131.

"Knowing how to live alone" here does not mean to live in solitude, separated from other people, on a mountain in a cave. "Living alone" here means living to have sovereignty of yourself, to have freedom, not to be dragged away by the past, not to be in fear of the future, not being pulled around by the circumstances of the present. We are always master of ourselves, we can grasp the situation as it is, and we are sovereign of the situation and of ourselves. There are many places in the sutras where the Buddha says that "being alone" does not mean to be separated from other people. We can be sitting in a cave, but we are not necessarily alone, because we have lost ourselves in our thinking, so we are not alone. In the Majjhima Nikaya there are at least four sutras that talk about the subject of knowing how to live alone, and in the Madhyama Agama there are also sutras that talk about the subject of living alone. Therefore, we know that the subject of living alone is a very important subject in the teachings of the Buddha. We have to know how to do this, how to live in freedom, not being imprisoned by the future and not being carried away by things in the present.

The Sutra on Knowing the Better Way to Live Alone teaches us how to live each moment of our daily life very deeply. When we can live our daily life deeply, we begin to have concentration and wisdom; we can see the true nature of life, and we arrive at a great freedom, and freedom is the essence of happiness. If we are suffering, it is because we are not free, and therefore to practice is to recover our freedom. When we have freedom, we will become solid. Freedom and solidity are the two characteristics of nirvana, so we need a program of freedom and solidity. If somebody is suffering, we know that person is not free; because they are not free, they are suffering, they are being imprisoned by the past, or they are being oppressed by the present, or they are being carried away by the future, and that is why they are suffering. The practice is to re-establish our freedom, and then we will no longer suffer, and our happiness will increase. The oldest writings on the better way to live alone, on how to live deeply in the present moment, are found in this sutra.

For example, someone hears the doctor say, "You have cancer, you may live for six months more." That person feels completely overwhelmed. The fear, the idea that I'm going to die in six months takes away all our peace and joy. Before the doctor told us that we had

cancer, we had the capacity to enjoy ourselves with our friends. However, once the doctor told us that, we lose all our capacity to sit and enjoy our tea, or enjoy our meal, or watch the moon, because we are so afraid of the moment when we will die. It takes away all our freedom. If you know that death is something that comes to everybody, you will not suffer so much. The doctor says we have six months left to live, but the doctor also will die. Maybe the doctor knows we have six months, but the doctor does not know how many months he himself has left to live. Maybe the doctor will die before us. Maybe driving home after the examination he will have an accident, and therefore the knowledge of the doctor isn't so great. He tells us we only have six months left. We may be lucky to live six months, because the doctor may die before us. So if we look deeply we see things, which if we don't look deeply we wouldn't see. Looking deeply we can get back our freedom from fear, and with that freedom, with our non-fear, we may live happily those six months.

All of us are equal as far as life and death are concerned: we are all going to die. So it is very equal—it will happen to everybody. Everyone has to die, but before we die, can we live properly? I am determined to live properly until I die. That is a very awakened thing to say. If we are going to die, then we have to live the best we can, and if we can live six months in the best way we can then the quality of that six months will be as if we were living for six years, or sixty years. If our life is filled with being caught in the fetters of suffering, then our life doesn't have the same kind of meaning as if we live in freedom. So knowing that we have to die, I am determined to live my life properly, deeply. All of us have to die, but if we are able to live with peace, joy, and freedom before we die, then we live as if we are dead already, even before we die.

First of all, the Buddha teaches us that we must struggle to get back our freedom, to be able to live the moments of our daily life deeply. In these moments of our daily life we can have peace, we can have joy, and we can heal the suffering we have in our bodies and in our minds. Living deeply at each moment of our life helps us to be in touch with the wonderful things of life, helps us to nourish our body and our mind with these wonderful elements, and at the same time helps us to embrace and transform the suffering that we have. So to live deeply in the present moment of every day of our life is to live a life of wonder, nourishment, and healing. Living like that we can revive our freedom, and live deeply: we give rise to the truth, we have awakened understanding, and our fears, our anxieties, our sufferings, and our sadness, will evaporate, and we will become a source of joy and life to ourselves and to those around us. According to Buddhism, that is the method of dwelling happily in the present moment. Looking carefully, we will see that this writing on knowing the better way to live alone is the oldest human writing about how to live the present moment, so it is a very important sutra. We should study it carefully, and then apply it in our lives and in the practice. We know that all the teachings related to the teachings on living in the present moment should be studied in the same way.

There was a monk whose name was Thera. His friends probably gave him the name Thera, which means "the elder." That monk liked to live on his own. He always went off on the alms round on his own. He liked to do walking meditation on his own. He like to eat on his own, he liked to wash his clothes on his own. He really liked to do everything on his own. He seemed to like to avoid his friends in the practice as much as possible. All the monks had heard the Buddha praising the better way to live alone, but the way the Buddha used the meaning of "living alone," he meant not to be imprisoned by the past, not to be pulled away by the future, and not to be carried away by what was happening in the present. The Buddha did not mean that living alone means to distance yourself and separate yourself

from your friends in the practice. Nevertheless, this monk liked to do things on his own, eating on his own, going to the town on his own, and avoiding other people. The other monks knew that he liked to do things alone, but they felt that there was something not quite right about this way of life. They felt that he wasn't really practicing according to the spirit of the Buddha's teachings. So the other monks went to the Buddha and they said, "Lord Buddha, one of our fellow practitioners called Thera, the elder, likes to do everything on his own: walking meditation, eating meditation, working on his own, and we don't know if living like that that is really truly living alone." And Buddha said, "Where is that monk? Ask him to come here and have a cup of tea with us." So the monks went and invited Thera to join them, and the Buddha said, "I hear you like to live alone. How do you live on your own? Please tell me." And Thera said, "Lord Buddha, I sit in meditation alone, I eat on my own, I wash my clothes on my own, I go into the village for alms on my own." And the Buddha said, "Oh, that is true, then you really do live alone. But maybe the way you live alone is not the best way to live alone, there is a better way to live alone." And then the Buddha recited a gatha: "If you live without being imprisoned by the past, not being pulled away by the future, not being carried away by the forms and images of the present moment, living each moment of your life deeply, that is the true way of living alone." When Thera heard this he knew that he had been living alone just as an outer form, and there was a deeper way to live alone.

The sutra where this story is told is called the Theranama Sutra, it is in the Samyutta Nikaya, and there is also an equivalent sutra in the Samyukta Agama, it is Number 71 in the Samyukta Agama. The essence of the sutra is a poem. The Buddha wrote poems, but the poems of the Buddha were more designed to show us how to practice. The gatha which talks about the art of living alone is called the Bhaddekaratta gatha, Bhaddekaratta means "the best way to live alone." Many people have mistranslated this title: One master translated it as "practicing for one night." There's also another master who translated this title as "being present." The correct translation is to say "The better way to practice living alone." This poem says:

Do not pursue the past.  
Do not lose yourself in the future.  
The past no longer is.  
The future has not yet come.  
Looking deeply at life as it is  
in the very here and now,  
the practitioner dwells  
in stability and freedom.

All of the essence of the Buddha's teachings lies in these words. We know that stability and freedom are the two characteristics of nirvana, and that is the aim of our practice. The aim of our practice is that every moment of our daily life we can produce stability and freedom: walking, lying down, sitting, standing, we produce freedom and stability. Nirvana is something we can touch right in the present moment, not only with our mind, but also with our body. When our feet are walking in a leisurely way, solid and free, then our feet are touching nirvana. As soon as we have stability and freedom, nirvana is there. The level of freedom and stability tells us whether we have been able to touch nirvana deeply. Do not pursue the past. There are people who are tired of the present and think that the past was more beautiful, and that life was more beautiful before. They always think the past

was more beautiful. Therefore, they cannot see the happiness of the present. Many of us are caught in this way of thinking. The past is no longer there, and we compare it with the present, and we say that the past was more beautiful than the present; but even when we had those moments in the past we didn't really value them at the time, because in the past we were not able to live in the present moment. We were always running after the future, and now if we were taken back to the past, we would do the same. At that time life was more beautiful, the sun was brighter, the moon was brighter--those are words from a French song. There are people who pursue the past, not because they think the past was beautiful, but because the past has made them suffer, the past was a trauma, a heavy wound for them. We have suffered, we have been wounded, we have died in the past, and those heavy wounds are calling us back to the past, crying, "Come back here, come back to the past. I am the subject, you cannot escape me." That is what the past says to us. We are like sheep running back to the past, to enclose us, to imprison us, to make us suffer. The past is also a very great prison. We hear the words of the past, and we run back to the past, we refuse to live our life in the present moment, we are always going back to the past. So the Buddha says, "Don't pursue the past."

These are the words of our teacher: "Don't pursue the past." We should write a poem, how can we write a poem so we are able to do this? Sometimes we are sitting with our friend. Our friend is sitting there, but we feel abandoned by our friend, because our friend is drowning in the past. Our friend is sitting next to us, but our friend is not with us, our friend is imprisoned by the past. Our friend is there, but our friend is not really there. We know that we are sitting there, and we feel that our friend is not sitting there with us. So we find a way to free our friend from the past, and we say to our friend: "A penny for your thoughts. What are you thinking about? Tell me. I'll give you ten centimes if you tell me." That person may wake up, jump up and smile and be free from the prison of the past. If we are a monk or a nun, we should know how to do this. We should know the method of being able to release our friend in the practice who is imprisoned and drowning in the past. We have to use our love, our mindfulness, and our friendship, to help that person out of the prison of the past. If we are a monk or a nun, we should know how to use our brothers and sisters in the practice to help us get out of our prison of the past. Therefore, living in a Sangha has these kinds of benefits.

(bell)

The Sanghakaya helps us in every step. The Sanghakaya brings us out of our prison of the past. The Sanghakaya takes our hand and leads us step by step into the present, so that we develop the capacity to dwell peacefully in the present. The moment when we shave our head, the moment when our teacher sprinkles water of compassion on our head, that moment is the moment when we are reborn, born a second time. All the Sangha is present around us, with their palms joined, while the drops of compassionate water penetrate us. With the water which is sprinkled on the top of our heads, we become a new person at that moment. That moment is the moment when we die. We allow the past to die, and we allow the present to be born. Our teacher and the Sangha are bringing us into life, giving us a new soul, a new body, a precepts body, a Dharma body, and that precepts body, that Dharma body are protected by Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and precepts. There is no reason for us to fear, and there is no reason for us to feel isolated or alone. There is no reason for us to be worried about anything. There is no need for us to worry about all the things that have happened in the past, all the bitterness of the past.

We can kneel, we can close our eyes, join our palms, and visualize this moment with the water of compassion falling on our head, and we can see ourselves being born anew. Our teacher and the Sangha are transmitting to us our precepts body, and we have the duty to allow our teacher and the Sangha to lead us step by step on this new path. We see we are protected, we are secure, with security from the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, and the precepts; and never before in our life have we felt as we feel at this moment. If we allow the Sangha to wake us up, if we allow our teacher to wake us up, we will see that we are in a state of security we have never been in before. If we live like that every day, our feelings of anxiety, of fear, will disappear. We will be able to dwell happily in the present moment, and each step will take us into happiness in the present moment, into freedom. That is our daily practice. "Do not pursue the past" is what this means. Sometimes we don't want to go back into the past, but the past grabs hold of us and pulls us back, so we have to organize things carefully, and we have to base our organization on the support of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. We have to look directly into the past and smile at it, and say, "You can no longer oppress me. I am free of you." Only the energy of mindfulness, the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, have enough power and strength to help us to be free of the past. We see that the past is just a ghost. We know that the past is a ghost, but we allow the ghost to imprison us. Therefore a practitioner should know how to take hold of the present with the help of the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha and the precepts, in order to come back to the present, and not allow the ghosts of the past to pull us back into the past. "Do not pursue the past," can you hear the Buddha saying that to you?

Do not imagine things and lose yourself in the future. What is the future? Is the future with ghost number two? Why are we so afraid of the future? What is fear? Is fear our plans about things which will happen tomorrow? Or is our fear our projections we have of the future, tomorrow? Maybe this will happen, or that will happen...we project it like that. And that is what makes us afraid. Fear does not naturally come about, fear comes from our thinking. Our thinking that this will happen tomorrow, that will happen tomorrow. Notice the future is something that is not yet there. Because the future is never there--once it's there it's the present. But the future is a ghost. A very big ghost, which sucks us up, and our fear arises from our projections that tomorrow this will happen, or tomorrow I will be like that. "What will become of me tomorrow?" Our fear is based on that. And the ghosts of the past and the ghosts of the future are two ghosts with great responsibility for taking away our freedom. We are slaves of these two ghosts. What is Mara? Who is Mara? Mara is the past, Mara is the future, those two Maras follow us and condition our life, order us about. We should not allow this to happen, we should not lie under the influence of these two ghosts. We have to have a way of dealing with these two ghosts, and the method is the better way to live alone, the way of living each moment in the present moment, not pursuing the past and not running after the future.

"The past is no longer there. The future has not yet come." That is just logic. We all know the past is just a ghost, why should we be so attached to it? And the future is just a ghost, why do we have to be so afraid of it? There's only one thing, that is the present, but we don't know how to live the present moment, and we allow the past and the future to drown us, to overwhelm us. "The past is no longer there. The future has not yet come." Are there any words in the sutra which are more precise, more concise? No word too many. You should live your daily moments deeply, as they occur: live and know that you are living. Like a flower, you know that it is alive, and you can look at it deeply and you can live with it deeply, and you can see the deep levels of the flower. You live with a smile, you live with



the sunshine. All these things become the objects of your looking deeply. They are your friends in the practice.

The practitioner dwells in stability and freedom, and "dwell" means to live peacefully. The practitioner means someone who has wisdom, it doesn't mean somebody who has just got a degree, or been to the university. Here it means someone who has wisdom, that is, someone who is not carried away by the ghosts of the past, who is not grasped at by the ghosts of the future, someone who knows how to live in a peaceful and joyful way, right in the present moment. That person can sit still, walk at peace, and that person has the essence of peace and freedom within him or her, and that is a wise person. Another way of translating this line is: "the wise person dwells in peace with solidity and freedom." All the teachings of the Buddha that have been given, the Dharma, and the Sangha, are there to help us to live in the present moment. When a monk takes a step, the monk has to practice dwelling peacefully. Each step the monk takes should be solid and free, and the monk is taking steps like the Buddha. When a nun sits down, she should sit solidly, like a mountain, sitting in mindfulness. We are always being carried away by the past and the future, but in the Sangha, everybody is training to practice living in the present moment, so when we live in a Sangha we have the opportunity to do this, to sit solidly. When we eat, we really eat. We have forty-five minutes or an hour to eat, and those are forty-five minutes or an hour of happiness, because we are really there. We are washing our clothes, and that is our practice. Sweeping the floor is our practice, cleaning the toilet is our practice. The main thing about the practice is that we are really there to do these things, and we have the Sangha there supporting us.

"We must be diligent today, to wait until tomorrow is too late." There is only today, let us do the best we can do today. People have given us all the conditions for practicing mindfulness, and yet we don't do it, we say we'll do it tomorrow, we needn't do it today. But tomorrow's too late, because of impermanence. "Death comes unexpectedly, how can we bargain with it?" Then you say to death, "Oh, I haven't had time to practice properly, give me another couple of days." However, we can't bargain like that with death, we cannot make a deal with death. Therefore death becomes something which stimulates us, motivates us, to help us live in solidity and freedom. So when the doctor says, "You have six months left," we can say, "Okay, then I will live that six months properly." And the doctor should say, "I will do the same," because the doctor also does not know how long he will live. So the fact of having to die helps the practitioner know that the days that are left have to be lived properly, solidly, in freedom, with happiness. That is the best way of laying the future for your descendants.

When the doctor says that you have six months left to live, that is a bell of mindfulness for you. We all have six months left to live, or seven months, or ten years, and the Buddha says, "Be diligent today, to wait until tomorrow is too late. Death comes unexpectedly." The person who knows how to live in mindfulness day and night the Buddha calls "the one who knows the better way to live alone." Here they call the Buddha the great muni. So the way to live alone is to live dwelling in mindfulness night and day.

We hear about ghost stories and we are afraid, but we have a tendency to like hearing ghost stories. People say that according to scientists there aren't any ghosts, but clearly there are ghosts: ghosts of the past, ghosts of the future, those two ghosts which we meet every day. When we were children, adults said. "When you meet a ghost make the peace mudra and say, Om, mani, padme hum!" and so we learned that by heart. And one

night we had a dream, and we saw a ghost, and we made the peace mudra and we said, "Om, mani, padme, hum!" but the ghost didn't seem to be afraid at all. The ghost just stayed there. But that kind of ghost we see in a dream is not a bad ghost. The bad ghosts are the ghosts of the past and the future.

The ghosts of the past and future, although they are bad ghosts, if we know how to deal with them, we will never fall under their influence, we only have to smile at them, we only need to breathe and come back to our mindfulness, and the energy of mindfulness helps us to smile and say "Oh, I know you are a ghost", and they can't do anything to hurt us, because in that smile there is the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. The reason we are caught by the ghosts of the past and the future is that we don't know that they're ghosts, and the smile to them is the smile of enlightenment. It has mindfulness in it, so we should practice smiling at the ghost of the past, and say, "I know you are the ghost of the past, and that is all you are." And then you are free. The ghost of the future is the same. When we are afraid of the future, we know that the ghost of the future is there. We have to look at that fear, and we have to say, "I know that you're only a ghost." Mara appears many times in our daily life. Every time Mara appears, we have to say, "I know you're Mara." And the Buddha smiles and says that when he sees Mara. In the sutras, Mara is always appearing and all the practitioner needs to do is to smile and say, "I recognize you, I know you are Mara." So whoever knows the practice, knows that the smile of mindfulness towards the Mara of the past or the Mara of the future is the only way to deal with it, and when we smile like that, it shows we have love for ourselves, and we don't make the past or the future an enemy. The past and the future are not our enemies.

Now we are going to read from the beginning of the Discourse on Knowing the Better Way to Live Alone:

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when the Lord was staying at the monastery in the Jeta Grove, in the town of Sravasti. He called all the monks to him and instructed them, "bhikkhus!" And the bhikkhus replied, "We are here." The Blessed One taught: "I will teach you what is meant by knowing the better way to live alone. I will begin with an outline of the teaching, and then I will give a detailed explanation. bhikkhus, please listen carefully." "Blessed One, we are listening." The Buddha taught:

We see clearly that the Buddha has a poem here, and the Buddha had composed a poem and he asked the monks to come and listen to him recite the poem that he composed, just like the poem that he gave to the monk, Thera. The Buddha replied to Thera very kindly. He said, "Living alone as you live alone, eating alone, walking alone, sitting alone, they are truly ways of living alone, but they are not the best way of living alone." Buddha thought, "I have to teach him properly." And then Buddha recited this poem:

"Bhikkhus, what is meant by 'pursuing the past?' When someone thinks about the way his body was in the past, the way his feelings were in the past, the way his perceptions were in the past, the way his mental factors were in the past, the way his consciousness was in the past; when he thinks about these things, and his mind is burdened by and attached to these things which belong to the past, then that person is pursuing the past".

Who is that person? That person is all of us. We have all been the victims of the past. We have been wounded in the past. Our body has been treated badly in the past, our feelings have been destroyed in the past, our perceptions have been darkened in the past, our mental factors have been full of sadness and sorrow in the past, and our consciousness has been covered in ignorance in the past. In short, in the past, a person that has form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness, ourselves in the past, has suffered and these experiences, these impressions have been carefully hidden away in the

depths of our unconscious mind. And although we don't want to pursue them, we don't want to remember them, because every time we remember them we suffer, we feel sad, we worry. We think that if the past was like that, how will the future be? So when the ghost of the past comes--it is closely linked to the ghost of the future--we're afraid of the future because our past has been like that. And because our experiences of the past are so sad, we know that if they were revived we would suffer and we would not be able to bear it, so we grit our teeth to get through and do our best to bury all our past experiences deep in our unconscious. Sometimes when we are sleeping they stir around while we are dreaming and come up, and the more we try to repress them the more they try to come up. We have a defense mechanism, which does its best to hide our suffering from us, and to bring about some kind of peace and joy in a superficial way. That is how we manage to continue living. We know there is a bomb, explosives, deep down in our consciousness, but they are covered over by many layers. We have buried them, pushed them down, and in our daily life, although we don't want to think about these things, these things secretly move around and they instruct us in what we should do, force us to do things. When we speak, we want to say something sweet, but we don't say something sweet because something is ordering us from deep down to say something unkind. We want to open our hearts to people, but we can't do it, because we are being ordered around by the sufferings we have concealed deep in our consciousness. So, in the past our body was like that, our feelings like that, our perceptions like that, our mental formations like that, our consciousness like that. When we think about these things, and our mind is burdened by and attached to these things which belong to the past, then we are pursuing the past. Whether a person consciously or unconsciously goes back to the past, that person is still pursuing the past.

First of all, we are wounded by the past, and secondly, whether they are very beautiful experiences or wounds from the past, those things pull us back into the past. Therefore, we have to be aware that if we don't practice we will always be a victim of the Mara of the past. Buddha doesn't mean we have to forget the past, or bury the past, or pretend that the past never happened. That is not what the Buddha means. Why? Because the past has become the present, and if we can live deeply in the present we can transform the past. In the present we have habit energies, very clear habit energies in the present, and when we can recognize those habit energies, and smile at those habit energies, we can free ourselves from those habit energies and transform them. Let me remind you again, we can return to the past in two ways. One is consciously, expressly, and the other is unconsciously, with a ghost pulling us back into the past. At the same time, the method of practice we use, called "dwelling peacefully in the present moment," is not to hide the fact that we are influenced by the past, because all the suffering of the past, all the ignorance and infatuation of the past, is present in this moment. It's present in the form of the present, the way we behave, the way we speak, the way we walk, those things are conditioned by what happened in the past. Therefore we have to live the present moment in order to see clearly what is happening in the present, and when we see that clearly, we can smile at it, and we can transform it.

The Buddha says that the wise person dwells peacefully in the present moment, looking deeply at life in the present moment. There are two ways of living: the first is to be in touch with the wonderful things of life, the things which have the capacity to nourish us; so we live in the present moment in order to be in touch with the wonderful elements which have the capacity to nourish and to heal. And the second way is to live in the present moment in order to look deeply and to be able to see the habits, the customs which are

ordering us around, which are commanding us to say things which we don't want to say, which are ordering us to think the things we don't want to think, ordering us to do the things we don't want to do, because they are destructive to us and to our peace. Only when we dwell peacefully in the present moment can we recognize all this and transform it. And once we transform, then the Mara of the past cannot do anything to harm us. In the past we have suffered, and because of our suffering in the past, we are afraid. That is why in the present we are afraid. There is nothing worthy of being afraid of, yet we're still afraid. That fear is not based on anything—it is just a habit. And because of that habit we have patterns of behavior which bring about moods in which we feel ill at ease, we lose our ease, our feeling of ease. We have to look deeply at life as it is in the present moment and see the face of these things, these habit energies, and we say, "Ah, that is a habit energy; that is something which is stopping me from opening my heart, stopping me from being able to love." And when we are in touch and recognizing it with a smile like that, that habit energy will disappear and the Mara of the past will also be transformed. Therefore, in this section, the Buddha teaches that if we allow ourselves to return to the past, allow the Mara of the past to take hold of us, then we don't have an opportunity to live the present, and we will not be nourished and healed by the wonderful things in the present.

"Bhikkhus, what is meant by 'not pursuing the past?' When someone thinks about the way his body was in the past, his feelings were in the past, his perceptions were in the past, his mental factors were in the past, his consciousness was in the past..." it means that we can think about the past, but we should not allow the past to take hold of us. The Buddha never says we can't think about the past—we have a right to think about the past, to think that in the past that happened to me, my body was like that, my mind was like that, we can think about it, but don't let these things pull you around, or imprison you.

"If he thinks about the way these things were in the past, but his mind is not enslaved by nor attached to these things which belong to the past, then that person is not pursuing the past." Some people think that dwelling peacefully in the present moment means they can only think about the present, they cannot think about the past, but that is not true. If we are able to establish ourselves solidly in the present, we can look deeply at the past and we can be liberated from the past. For example, we tell a story of something that happened to us in the past. There are two ways of telling the story: one, we tell it in such a way that we are wholly taken up, we are held by that story in the past, and we cry like rain falling down and then we cannot help ourselves to escape from that. The other way is that we establish ourselves solidly in the present moment with a brother or sister beside us, and we tell the story of our past for them to hear, and we tell exactly what happened, but we tell it in a very even way, the past does not pull us away so that we cry, tears falling.

We dwell solidly in the present in order to look deeply into the past. We should not say that the practice of mindfulness in Plum Village does not allow you to look at the past. Once we are dwelling solidly in the present, we can look at the past. If we are weak in the practice we need to know how to produce more mindfulness, and have brothers and sisters supporting us in order to be ready to look into the past without being carried away by the past. And that is why the Sangha is important. If you want to look deeply into the past, you should know who is stronger, you or the ghost of the past. If you feel that the ghost of the past is still stronger than you are, you should practice more walking meditation and sitting meditation in order to make yourself stronger, and then have your brothers and sisters sitting near you when you look deeply into the past. So, this is the program, to be

able to face the past. If you live in the Sangha, with people practicing with you, you have a very favorable condition to be able to look deeply into the past.

"Bhikkhus, what is meant by 'losing yourself in the future?' When someone thinks about the way his body will be in the future, the way his feelings will be in the future, the way his perceptions will be in the future, the way his mental factors will be in the future, the way his consciousness will be in the future; when he thinks about these things and his mind is burdened by and daydreaming about these things which belong to the future, then that person is losing himself in the future." And so it is a kind of fear. All these things are Mara, and if Mara of the past or Mara of the future takes hold of you, you are no longer really able to live the present moment. You should know that the Pure Land, the Sukhavati, the Paradise, are only in the present moment, and we lose the Pure Land or Paradise because the ghosts of the past and the future pull us away from the present. An arhat is someone who is able to destroy the Mara of the past and the future. Sadness and fear are names of Mara, of two ghosts, two large ghosts.

(bell)

We should return to the story of the person who is told by the doctor that he has only six months to live. He says, "Okay, I know I will die in six months." But he shouldn't be so sure the doctor is right, because doctors often predict wrongly. Some people are told that they have only six months to live but they live for many years. It depends on the way that we live. All the same, we say, "Okay, from now until I die I am going to live properly, with peace and freedom and solidity, and I'm going to make the quality of my life so much better." And once that person is free, is not caught in the past or the future, is not afraid of the future and can live solidly, free in the present moment, and see deeply what life is about, then that person will see that his or her life span is limitless.

We have read other sutras. We know that sutras such as the Lotus Sutra, the Vajracchedika Sutra, talk about the lifespan of the Buddha as being limitless. The idea of a lifespan--that I was born at that particular moment, that I will die at that particular moment, and my life between those two moments is my lifespan--that is because we don't know how to live solidly and freely in the present moment. If we live solidly and freely in the present moment and look at life deeply, we will discover that our lifespan is limitless, like the lifespan of the Buddha. And the thing which is called birth cannot touch our lives, and death cannot touch our lifespan. We see that there isn't life, birth and death--there are manifestation and latency. We can be in touch with no-birth and no-death, and after six months or sixty years, it doesn't make any difference. When we can be in touch with the birthless and deathless nature, birth and death cannot oppress us anymore. This is what Tue Trung Thuong si said: "The idea of birth and death have oppressed us, but now they cannot touch us any more." And when the doctor says we have six months left to live, or whether he says it's one month or thirty years, it doesn't make any difference, because we are going to live our time with peace and solidity and freedom. And if we can do that we may live longer than the doctor. The doctor may die before we do, because the doctor lives without mindfulness, without peace, without joy, without a Sangha, but we have been woken up by the sound of this bell, and we have decided to live our life with peace, with joy and this life of peace and joy may help us to live longer than the doctor.

"Bhikkhus, what is meant by not losing yourself in the future?' When someone thinks about the way his body will be in the future, the way his feelings will be in the future, the way

his perceptions will be in the future, the way his mental factors will be in the future, the way his consciousness will be in the future, when he thinks about these things but his mind is not burdened by or daydreaming about these things which belong to the future, then he is not losing himself in the future." Dwelling peacefully in the future, we are not afraid. We think that whatever will happen to us in the future, we will not be afraid. We are not afraid of death, because we have lived deeply, we have looked deeply, we have been in touch with the world of no-birth and no-death, and so at that moment we know that this corpse is not us, we do not identify with the body, so we are not afraid. There are people who think of their moment of death, and they suffer, they suffer thinking about leaving their dear ones. And there are others who think about death, and they can smile. Why is that? What is the difference? The difference is that one person is able to live deeply the present moment, and therefore sees the non-birth, non-death nature of life, whereas the other person isn't. So it is because we purposely do not want to think about death that we fear death. We do think about death, and we do it in order to look deeply at it. The practitioner is told that every day they should repeat the Five Remembrances: "I am of the nature to grow old; there is no way to escape growing old. I am of the nature to have ill health; there is no way to escape ill health. I am of the nature to die; there is no way to escape death. All that is dear to me and everyone I love are of the nature to change. There is no way to escape being separated from them." The Buddha told us we must practice looking like this every day. Buddha is our doctor. Buddha reminds us of this in order to help us return to the present moment and live deeply in the present moment. And if we can live deeply in the present moment, we will go beyond ideas of old age, death and sickness. We can smile, and if any of these things happen to us we are happy, because this is an opportunity for us to begin anew.

The Fifth Remembrance is "My actions are my only true belongings. I cannot escape the consequences of my actions. My actions are the ground on which I stand." In the sutra we see clearly that living in the present moment does not preclude our thinking about the past or the future, but we must dwell in the present moment so that whenever we look deeply into the past or the future, we are free and we are able to overcome our fears and our sadness concerning these things. Because in the teachings of interbeing, interpenetration, the past makes the future, and the future is made out of the past. Therefore, being in touch with the present, we are already being in touch with the past and the future, but we are not being carried away by the Maras of the past and the future.

Let us read more: "Bhikkhus, what is meant by being swept away by the present? When someone does not study, or learn anything about the Awakened One, or the teachings of love and understanding, or the community that lives in harmony and awareness; when that person knows nothing about the noble teachers and their teachings, and thinks, 'This body is myself; I am this body. These feelings are myself; I am these feelings. This perception is myself; I am this perception. This mental factor is myself; I am this mental factor. This consciousness is myself; I am this consciousness.' Then that person is being swept away by the present." This section is very clear, it is said to explain very clearly what is meant by the two lines:

"Looking deeply at life as it is in the very here and now." When we look deeply at life as it is, we do not think that this body is mine, or say that this body is me. We say when this body isn't there anymore, I'm not there anymore, because thinking like this we are afraid. And thinking like this is what enables the Mara of the past and the future to take hold of us. Therefore living deeply the present moment is to discover the interbeing nature, the

interpenetrating nature of all things, so that we are not ordered around by the ignorant idea of self. We do not think, "I am this body, I am just this body; I am this feeling, I am just this feeling; I am this mental factor, this mental factor is me." When we do not identify ourselves with the body, the feelings, etc., then we are not caught in the idea about a self, and at that point there is no ghost who can influence us, either of the past or the future, because when we can live like that we are already in the world of no-birth and no-death. When we are in touch with that world of no-birth and no-death, we cannot be imprisoned by the past, and the future cannot produce any fear for us. This is the essence, the cream of the Buddha's teachings.

"Bhikkhus, what is meant by not being swept away by the present? When someone studies and learns about the Awakened One, the teachings of love and understanding, and the community that lives in harmony and awareness; when that person knows about noble teachers and their teachings, practices these teachings, and does not think, 'This body is myself; I am this body. These feelings are myself; I am these feelings. This perception is myself; I am this perception. This mental factor is myself; I am this mental factor. This consciousness is myself; I am this consciousness,' then that person is not being swept away by the present.' Just these words, but we can use them the whole of our life—what belongs to our bodies, what belongs to our feelings, our mental formations?—we live them every day, and we see that the causes and conditions which have brought about these things. We see that the body is just body, caused and conditioned, the feelings are feelings, caused and conditioned, and we are no longer caught in these things, and so the past and the future and the present cannot oppress us, cannot order us around.

"Bhikkhus, I have presented the outline and a detailed explanation of knowing the better way to live alone." Thus the Buddha taught, and the Bhikkhus were delighted to put his teachings into practice."

(Sounds of Thay writing) eka means one, vihari means dwelling, and dwelling alone...when we live with a ghost we are not living alone, we are living with another. You are sitting there, you are eating your meal, but you have the ghost sitting alongside of you, therefore you are not living alone. When we see a brother or a sister sitting with a ghost, we have to say, "Who are you sitting with?" and then our brother or sister will wake up. So, don't allow that ghost to oppress you. We have to destroy the ghosts, destroy Mara. In the present we have infatuations, attachments, sadness, projects, and when we live with these things we are not living alone, we are living with the ghosts, and a practitioner should not dwell with ghosts, we should live alone.

[End of Talk]

# *The Sutra on Measuring and Reflecting*

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Dear Friends,

Today is the 26<sup>th</sup> of March and we are in the New Hamlet in the Spring Retreat.

When we hear the sound of the bell, we should open ourselves up to allow all the generations of ancestors in us to hear the bell at the same time as we do. It means we shouldn't imprison ourselves in a shell of self – we should allow our ancestors to listen to the bell at the same time. That is our practice at that moment, because all the generations of ancestors, including our father and our mother are in us in a very concrete way - in every cell of our body. The body contains the mind – the soma contains the psyche, and we could say that the mind also contains the body. That means that the psyche contains the soma and that psyche includes feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness and we should learn to see our mental formations are made out of cells, just as the body is made out of cells. The cells of the body contain the cells of the consciousness and the cells of the consciousness contain the cells of the body.

Psyche and soma are just two sides of the same reality. There isn't one that precedes the other, just like the particle and the wave are two aspects of the same reality. The wave contains the particle, just as the particle contains the wave. The reality of us is the reality of body and mind. We could call ourselves psyche and we could call ourselves soma, but in fact psyche and soma are two aspects manifesting from one reality. If we look into one cell of our body, or one cell of our consciousness, we recognize the presence of all the generations of ancestors in us – that is the truth. Our ancestors are not just human beings. Before human beings appeared we were other species. We have been trees, plants, grasses, minerals, squirrels and deer. We have been monkeys and one-celled animals and all these generations of ancestors are present in each cell of our body as well as our mind and we are the continuation of this stream of life. Therefore, when we hear the bell, it is not a separate "I" which is listening to the bell, but it is the stream, the vast stream of life, and this is the practice of no-self. We talk a lot about no-self. We could talk about it very fluently but we don't practice no-self, we just talk about it. When we hear the sound of the bell and we allow all the generations of ancestors and all our descendants, which are already present in our body, to hear it also then we are experiencing the reality of no-self which the Buddha taught. No-self is not some vague idea, but it is a reality which we carry in our very person and we only need to listen properly to the bell and we can go beyond the shell of self. We can go beyond the prison of the idea of a separate self and we allow the sound of the bell to penetrate every generation of the past and the future which is in us.

We were earlier talking about guava fruit. Even when the guava fruit is not yet ripe, it has all its seeds of future trees. When we are only 4 years old we think we can only be a child 4 years old... we can only be a little brother, but in fact we are already a mother, already a father. A little novice of 12 or 13 years old plays the role of a disciple, but he already has his own disciples in his person and he has disciples of his disciples in his person already. So when he hears the sound of the bell, the young novice must open his heart so that all the generations of ancestral teachers can hear the bell at the same time, so that all the generations of his blood family can hear the bell at the same time, and so that all the generations of his future students, in him now, can hear the bell. And if he practices like that, he is practicing 'no-self' and he is able to see the wonder of no-self and he is giving a Dharma talk on no-self. To listen to the bell like that is to hear the bell according to the highest teachings.

When we take a step on the green grass of spring, we walk in such a way that allows all our ancestors to take a step with us. Our peace, our joy, our freedom, which are in each step, penetrate each generation of our ancestors and each generation of our descendants. If we can walk like that, that is a step taken in the highest dhyana. When we take one step we see hundreds and thousands of ancestors and descendants taking a step with us, and when we take a breath we are light, at ease, calm. We breathe in such a way that all the generations of ancestors are breathing with us and all the generations of our descendants are also breathing with us... if we breathe like that, only then are we breathing according to the highest teachings. We just need a little mindfulness, a little concentration and then we can look deeply and see. At first we use the method of visualization and we see, as we walk, all the ancestors putting their foot down as we put our foot down, and gradually we don't need to visualize any more – each step we take, we see that that step is the step of all people in the past.

When you are cooking a dish of food - something you have learnt from your mother or your father, a dish that has been handed down through generations of your family – you should look at your hand and smile because this hand is the hand of your mother, the hand of your grand-mother. Those who have made this dish are making this dish now and that is the truth! We are not the inventors of this dish, we are just continuing. We see our mothers hand, our grand-mothers hand, and the hands of all our ancestors making this dish. When we are in the kitchen cooking, we can realize the highest teachings – we don't have to go into the meditation hall to practice this. We have so many opportunities, the problem is – do we know how to make the most of them? We have our teacher, we have our Sangha, we have our dharma teachings, we have all the conditions that are necessary to do this and we should use these opportunities. This is not a theory, this is real experience of our daily life... it is real life.

In the past, your grandfather – did he play volleyball? No, he didn't, because in those days they didn't have volleyball... Did your grandmother go jogging every day? Did your grand-mother have the opportunity to practice dwelling in the present moment while she was walking... while she was running? When we are running we should allow our grandmother to run in us, and it is the truth that your grandmother is running in you. She is in each cell of your body. You carry all your ancestors in you when jogging, when doing walking meditation and when you are realizing the practice of dwelling happily in the present moment. Maybe other generations didn't have the opportunity to practice like this. Now we have the opportunity. We have received the practice as taught by our teachers and when we do that practice we bring happiness and joy to countless generations of ancestors, whether we're practicing walking, running, or breathing.

We have produced Plum Village in order to be able to do these things, because in the town, in the society, we don't have the right conditions to be able to walk like we do, to be able to breathe, to smile like we do, to wash clothes and to cook like we do in Plum Village. An environment where we can feel at ease, where we can do these things in a very leisurely way, in order to practice dwelling happily in the present moment. We know that many people have supported, and have brought time and energy to give us an environment where we can take steps at ease, where we can breathe in and out like this... where we can cook like this... where we can practice like this. And when we practice like this, we are doing it for all times – for the past and for the future. Thanks to our taking steps like this, and breathing and smiling and sitting like this, we are able to liberate so many generations. We liberate them by getting out of the shell of our separate self.

Western psycho-therapy aims at healing and bringing us a self which is stable and wholesome, but the psycho-therapy in the West is still caught in the idea of 'self'. Psycho-therapy in the West can bring about a little transformation, a little healing, but it cannot go very far because Western psycho-therapy is still caught in the idea of a 'self'. According to Western psycho-therapy, the family can bring about ease and peace and joy; but because of misfortune our family has not been able to bring about that. So now, how can our practice take us out of this misfortune so that we can, once again, bring back happiness and peace in our lives. Western psychology is based on the idea that we had a self that was happy and at peace and joy and we have to revive and restore that state of peace, happiness and joy that we had before. But in the light of the practice of Buddhism, for as long as we are caught in the idea of a separate self, ignorance is still in us – in our body and in our mind. Therefore, the practice of no-self is the most wonderful way to heal. Practicing no-self is to get out of the narrow idea of the self, to see the intimate relation between what is self and what is not-self. That way, ignorance is healed and all the suffering, the anger, the jealousy, and the fear, will disappear, and the fruit which is achieved is a thousand times greater than the healing which is based on the idea of a separate self.

We are people who have problems... psychological problems, and we ask ourselves questions like – *"Who am I? When my mother and father came together, did they want me to come into this world or did they just come together and I was the result... rather like a misfortune, an accident... Did they want to have me or did I just appear as an accident? My mother and father came together in a thoughtless way and because of that I came into this world..."* If I think like that, I will suffer. There are people who say, *"When I came into this life did my parents want to keep me or did they want to destroy me – did they want to have an abortion?"* Many people suffer when they think that their parents may have wanted to have an abortion. *"Who am I? Was I wanted? What is the meaning of my life?"* We are inclined to ask questions like that and when we try and answer those questions we suffer because we are caught in an idea of a separate self. When a young child grows up and if he knows that in the past, his mother had wanted to have an abortion, that child will suffer a lot. He knows that his parents didn't want to have that child and it was an accident that the



child was born and if the child knows that, he will suffer very much and that suffering will bring about illnesses. How will the psycho-therapist be able to help that child? "*Does my life have a meaning? Where do I come from? Who am I?*" These questions can be the source of abnormalities, of sufferings in the life of a person, but if we look deeply, according to the way the Buddha taught, we can see the reality of no-self and we will no longer ask questions like that. This is one of the essential points which we learn in the *Sutra on the Middle Way*. First of all we see that we are a continuation of a stream of life. Whether our parents wanted us or not is not so important. Maybe our father and mother didn't want us, or didn't want us yet, but our grandparents and our ancestors wanted us to come into life and that is the truth. The truth is that our ancestors, our grandparents, always want a continuation. If it's not this generation, it will be the next generation. There are always generations who want us to be their continuation and if we can answer that way, then the child will not suffer from thinking their parents didn't want them, because any parents have their ups and downs – their good moments and their not-so-good moments. Sometimes they are full of love and sometimes they are full of anger, and this love and anger is not the only thing that they have. It is not only from them, but from all generations and when we can see that their love and their anger comes from all generations, we no longer blame our parents. We see that our parents have good things as well as very unwholesome things.

In the East, we are forced to someone to marry someone we hate and we say, "*Why do our parents make us marry this person we don't like?*" But after we have lived with this person for two or three years, we discover that the person they made us marry is very likeable and we thank our parents – we see that our parents had a certain wisdom in judging that person to be a good husband and they had a good reason to allow this coming together to happen. We all have friends, who in the beginning we didn't like at all – we hated them! When we saw that person we hated them so much, but after a while we discover that person is a very good friend and therefore that moment of hatred is not everything. It is just a moment; it is not eternal and after that moment of hatred there are moments of great love and therefore hatred and love are just on the surface. Deeper than that is something else and when we can see that, we are not sad and we don't say things like – "*Do my father and mother love me or not?*", because maybe, at one point during the pregnancy, they didn't want me, but after I was born they loved me very much and they are very happy I was born. So we see we are our father and mother. We see we are our grandparents and when we get out of the shell of self we are no longer made to suffer by the question "*Was I wanted?*" Therefore, when we study Buddhism and practice according to the no-self teachings of Buddhism, we are able to liberate ourselves and also liberate numberless generations of ancestors and descendants in us.

In our childhood we may have been through stages of great difficulties. We have been wounded, we have had traumas and we generally do not want to remember those stages of suffering. In us there is a protective defense mechanism, we want to defend ourselves against our suffering. Every time we are in touch with the experience of suffering, we cannot bear it and therefore the thing called "defense mechanism" tries to hide these things deep down in our unconscious mind and when someone comes along and digs up these sufferings, we cry, we weep, we are sorrowful and we cannot eat for a couple of days. But running away from our suffering is not the best way to deal with it. Therefore, in Buddhism we are taught that we should practice mindfulness. We should produce the energy of mindfulness and return and embrace the young child who is wounded in us. That young child can have been very heavily wounded – very severely wounded, but because, for many decades, we haven't had the strength to deal with it, we have tried to run away from that suffering. We have not dared to face it and therefore the wounded child in us continues to suffer and is asking for care and love, but we do the opposite – we run away. We are always running away, because we are afraid of suffering and therefore the method of Buddhism is to practice in such a way that we produce the energy of mindfulness and with the energy of mindfulness we are no longer afraid. We are able to return and we are able to recognize that child in us. We are able to embrace that child in us and we are able to talk to that child in us. When we have the energy of mindfulness we have the capacity to embrace that child like we would embrace a young brother or sister who has been wounded and we say, "*I have, in the past, left you alone – I have gone away from you... now I am very sorry. I am going to embrace you.*" We have to embrace that child and, if necessary, we have to cry together with that child perhaps while we are doing sitting meditation. We have to talk to that child with the language of love... We can go into the forest and do that. We can call that child a little sister or little brother.

Among us there are people who have practiced this and after a period of practice there has been a diminution of their suffering and a transformation. After that, the relationship between that person and their brothers and sisters and friends become much easier, because they have come back to themselves and healed the wounded child in themselves. The people around us, our brothers and sisters, may also have a severely wounded child in them and we can help them if we have managed to help ourselves. And therefore, after we have healed ourselves, we see the relationship between ourselves and others has become much better, much easier. We see more peace, more love in us. In Buddhism, we see that that wounded child is not just us... not only us. It may also be our mother, because our mother has suffered throughout her life. Our father has suffered, and our mother and father did not meet the Dharma in order to be able to look after the wounded child in themselves and therefore, that wounded child in us is our mother who has been wounded as a child. So when we are embracing the wounded child in us, we are embracing all our mothers of generations in the past – all the wounded children of our past generations. This practice is not a practice for ourselves alone, but it is a practice for numberless generations of ancestors and descendants. Therefore, when we are able to embrace the child who has been wounded in us, we are able to embrace our mother and our father. Maybe our father and our mother had suffered and the baby, the child, in them has not yet been looked after, not yet been healed, and so we heal the wounded child in us for our father, for our mother, and for our grandparents. If we don't do it now, when will we do it? Now we have our teacher. Now we have our friends. Now we have our Sangha... and we don't do it, so when will we do it? The years and months we spend in Plum Village are not to give us knowledge, to form us in Buddhist studies, because Plum Village is not a university for us to come and receive the heap of knowledge which, later on, we will take with us in order to get a job or in order to teach to others. Plum Village is a place where we are able to practice embracing and transforming the wounded child in us. In us, the wounded child is always there, is always waiting, and we have abandoned it. Now we have to return to her and recognize her; accept her presence, embrace her, weep with her, and with the energy of mindfulness, heal her. And in the light of the *Sutra on the Middle Way*, we know that this child, who has been wounded, is not just us, but it is also the child of other generations. It is the wounded child of our mother, the wounded child of our father, the wounded child of our grandparents and when we practice, we practice for all our ancestors.

Where is that child? That child is lying in each cell of our body. There is no cell of our body which does not have that wounded child in it. The cells of our consciousness and the cells of our body. Our consciousness is made of cells and in each cell of our consciousness, of our mental formations, that wounded child is there – abandoned, severely wounded. We don't have to look for that child a long way away in the past... 3 million years ago. We don't have to look for that child in our childhood or in the time of our great-grandparents because all the truth of that wounded child, all the suffering of that wounded child is lying, right now, in the present moment, in each cell of our body and our consciousness. We just have to go back to ourselves and be in touch and we will see all of this. You are inscribed in each cell of your body and your mind. You don't have to go back to the past, that child lies in the present. The wounds, the suffering, the sadness... it is present in every cell of your body just as the awakened wisdom of your ancestors, of the Buddha, the happiness of the Buddha, is also present in every cell of your body. You should know how to return to it and make use of it – these elements of happiness, of awakened wisdom, in order to produce the energy of mindfulness and embrace the child who has been wounded. The wounds, as well as the happiness, are in each and every one of your cells. The Buddha, the ancestors, and the teachers have handed down this awakened wisdom that is lying in each cell of your body. You just need to return, with your breathing and your steps to produce the energy of mindfulness and wisdom and that energy will embrace and heal you, and it will heal the wounded child in you.

We are people who have ignorance in each cell of our body and our mind. That ignorance is called *Avidya*– lack of clarity. It means the "inability to see" things which are just lying there, we don't know that they're there. *Avidya*– no seeing, no clarity. This term is in Buddhism, it means lack of light, lack of insight, lack of seeing... That wounded child is lying there and we don't even know the wounded child is there. The wounded child in us is a reality, but we can not see it and that inability to see it is called ignorance. This child has been severely wounded. It really needs us to return to it and accept it, to embrace it, but we don't know that it's there and we are running away from it. That attitude – if you don't want to use 'ignorance'... what do you call it? We are looking to make money, making profit, but at the same time we are not aware of what is really happening in us, and that ignorance brings about energies that make us sick. In each cell of our body, each cell of our consciousness, there is this ignorance. It is like a drop of ink in a glass of water. That ignorance is in each cell of our body. It stops us from seeing reality and it pushes us in the direction of darkness so that we do things which are foolish and which make us suffer even more and which makes the wounded child in us even more wounded. That energy of darkness is called 'impulse' and everyday our impulses push us to do things, to say things, which are ignorant because the basis of our impulses is ignorance. We are sad, we are angry, we blame, we are jealous... all these things are the energy of impulse and the basis of that is ignorance. These impulses – we do not see them. They lie in our consciousness. Our consciousness is 'wrong' consciousness. It is full of ignorance and impulse.

Buddhist psychology has two parts. One we talk about is 'mind consciousness' and the other is 'store consciousness'. In Western terms we talk about the 'unconscious' and the 'subconscious' and in Buddhism these two things are contained in the *Alaya* consciousness, the store consciousness. We push our severely wounded child down into those regions. The deeper, the better. The child is calling, crying out for help from those places, but we don't hear and all this is ignorance and therefore, ignorance has brought about our present consciousness. In each cell of our body and in every

cell of our consciousness, we have the subconscious and the unconscious, and the energy of them pushes us to live our daily life superficially and foolishly, bringing about more and more suffering for ourselves and those who live around us. Therefore, what we are learning in the practice is - from ignorance, to make clarity. How can we have light in the darkness? We are walking in the dark, so we do things opposite to what we want to do and we know that we want light. Light means being able to light up a lamp and we have to take that light out of our body and our consciousness. Because, in our body and our consciousness, not only is there ignorance and impulses, but there is also awakened understanding because we have been handed down the seeds of understanding by our ancestors. The thing is... we never use them! Buddha has handed them down to us; our teacher has handed down to us; we receive them and we hide them away. We store them away and we don't use them. It is like we have a lamp which we never light up and that lamp is called mindfulness and the oil of that lamp is our breathing, our steps, our smile, our working in mindfulness. We have to light up that lamp. Light up the lamp of mindfulness and the light will shine out and the darkness will cease, will dissipate.

When light is there, there will not be ignorance and when ignorance retreats, these impulses are no longer produced because clarity brings about a different energy which is called '*bodhicitta*'. The great aspiration – the 'mind of love' - it is also energy, just like impulses are energy, but this is an energy with light in it and impulses are full of darkness. When we have lit up the lamp, we have a different energy than when we are in darkness. That is the energy of understanding, of *bodhicitta*, and when we have the energy of *bodhicitta* already, our consciousness is illumined and so it's called '*prajna*', 'wisdom'. Wisdom and consciousness have the same basis, but we can talk about consciousness only when it has ignorance in it, but when consciousness is lit up by *bodhicitta*, we no longer call it 'consciousness', we call it wisdom, *prajna*, understanding. If we have the wisdom of *bodhicitta* in each cell of our body and of our consciousness, there is happiness. We have a 'manifestation' body – *Nirmanakaya*. We still have eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body, but in each cell there is love, there is *bodhicitta*, there is wisdom and understanding. Therefore, the key of the practice is to light up the lamp. We have a gatha which is very good... whenever we turn on the light, we say, "*Lighting up the candle, I make an offering to all the Buddhas, the numberless Buddhas, to lighten up the face of the earth.*" Before I light the lamp, I breathe and I say this gatha. I see that the ignorance of my mind gives way to the light of my mind. In our mind, there is the light of understanding and in the room, there is the light of the lamp. It is not enough just to turn on the light, because if you just turn on the light, or light the candle, that is only an outer light. We have to turn on the inner light, the light of mindfulness. So when the young novice has just become a monk, he has to learn these poems so that every time he lights the lamp, he can light up understanding in his heart as well. If he doesn't do that, however many times he turns on the light in the room, he will never change the darkness in his mind into the light of his mind.

When we can say that we have forgotten the wounded child in ourselves, we feel great compassion for that child. We see how we have to practice our breathing and our mindful walking in order to be able to be stable enough to embrace that child, to comfort and heal that child. If the light of mindfulness is great, if it is clear, if it is sufficient, we will see that that child is not just ourselves, but it is also our mother, our father. Our mother and our father have suffered and they have not had the opportunity to embrace the child in them, so we are doing it for them. Because the wounded child in us is also our father, is also our mother... ask yourself – is there any understanding that is greater than that understanding? We talk a lot about understanding, but is any understanding higher than the understanding of Buddhism? When we can smile, we know we are smiling for our mother and our father, we know we are liberating our mother and our father. If we practice like that then the questions which make people suffer – "*Who am I? Did my mother really want me? Did my father really want me? What meaning does my life have?*" - all those questions become meaningless. In the *Sutra on the Middle Way*, the *Sutra on Interdependent Arising*, and the *Sutra on Great Emptiness*, we will see that if we can only practice, we will be able to go beyond these questions which make people suffer so much— We don't need those sufferings any more.

We don't need to go to Ireland or go to China to find our roots. We don't need to go back to the old native land. We just need to be in touch with every cell in our body. We can find out it's because of father, mother and all of our ancestors who are present in a very real way in each cell of our body. Even the bacteria are our ancestors, and the awakened understanding has been transmitted to us from all generations and all the sentient beings, but also insentient beings – so-called beings without feelings – have their own wisdom. Scientists today talk about life as matter which is inert. Before there was life this world, this universe, was a kind of... in the West we call it 'primordial soup'... from which everything came. All the neutrons, electrons, the inert matter, became living matter. It began to be a fungi, an amoeba, and then fish. They always use the word matter, because they have been influenced into thinking that in the beginning there was just matter, there was just soma. They don't see that matter contains spirit. Object of perception is also perception. The thing which they call matter - the object of our perception - is also perception, so it is also mind. So mind contains matter and matter contains mind. They are two faces of the same reality, sometimes something manifests as matter and sometimes something manifests as mind. The elementary particle can be called a wave or it can also be called a particle, because sometimes it appears as a wave and sometimes it appears as a particle, it is both things. You would say "*Something cannot be both form – both particle and wave – those two things... how can they be one?*", but in fact, these two things are one. We are both father and child, sometimes we manifest as father and sometimes we manifest as child... or mother. As soon as the guava fruit is born, it has guava seeds in it, so it is already a mother or a father.

So this is 'thinking matter', they say that human beings are 'thinking matter'. The matter now has thinking in it or thinking manifests from matter. Scientists say that there was a stage when human beings first stood up, they no longer crawled along, and they call the human species at that time 'homo erectus'. Then afterwards they had a kind of man called 'homo habilis', and then 'homo sapien', and 'homo sapien' is the thinking matter. Now we have another expression, 'homo conscious', which means the human being who is aware, who is mindful. A human being who knows – "I will get sick... I will grow old... I will die..." , that is a person who is aware and because of that awareness, that person suffers more. That awareness brings about anxiety and fear, called 'anguish', and this brings about ill health. People ask, "Do other species have less awareness and therefore do not have the suffering of thinking 'Oh, I will get old, I will die' ". If other species do have that awareness it is a slight awareness, if they get sick, they get sick and they don't have to worry about getting sick. But because human beings have this 'anguish', we have questions of philosophy, like "Who am I? What will happen to me?", we have the kind of questions that people sometimes asked, as recorded in the Sutras, "Did I exist in the past? If I did exist in the past, what kind of animal was I? Was it a beautiful animal? Was it an ugly animal.... Was I a frog? Will I exist in the future, and if I exist in the future, what kind of animal will I be? Will I have a beautiful face? Will I have a long tail?" All these questions that we ask come from this anguish and it brings about a lot of illness.

Did my parents want me? Was it an accident that I was born? Does anybody love me? All those questions make us suffer so much! And they come from our thinking - from this anguish, but the capacity to be aware – that is, the human being who is mindful – that is what will save us. That awareness will help us to know that the environment of this planet belongs to all species and will help us to realize that the human species is destroying the environment. When people are aware of these sufferings... they have come from political oppression... have witnessed injustice in society... When people can really see these things, they have the capacity to stop what they are doing and to help others to stop in order to go in a different direction which will not destroy our planet. Our awareness brings about our anxiety and our anguish, but if we know how to use that awareness, that mindfulness, we will be able to see the state we are in and we know what we should do and what we should not do in order to be able to transform and bring about peace and happiness and life for the future. The Buddha was one of the most beautiful people of the human species who we call 'homo conscious'. We have the homo erectus; the homo habilis (the skillful man), and we have the homo sapiens – (the thinking man). But now we have the expression 'homo conscious', (the aware man). It is an expression which has been used by people – it was not invented by me.

So when we are having a meal, we should eat in such a way that allows leisure, ease and happiness, because it is really a deep practice to eat together. Just as with your breathing and working, eat in such a way that your ancestors can eat with you. Your father eats with you, your grandfather and grandmother eat with you. Sit at ease, like someone who has no problems, no anxiety. The Buddha taught us that when we eat we should not allow ourselves to be lost in meaningless thinking and conversation. We should dwell in the present moment to be deeply in touch with the food and the Sangha around us. Eat in such a way that we are happy, at ease, that we have peace, so that each of our ancestors and descendants in us can benefit. In former times, when I was 4 or 5 years old, every time my mother went to the market, she brought me back a cake made of bean paste. Before my mother came back, I would be playing in the garden with the snails and the pebbles, and when my mother came back I was very happy to see her and I took the cake that she gave me and I went off to eat it in the garden. I knew I mustn't eat it quickly, I wanted to eat it slowly - the slower, the better. I'd just chew a little bit off the edge to allow the sweetness of the biscuit to go into my mouth and I'd look up at the blue sky. I'd look down at the dog. I'd look at the cat. That is how I ate the cake and it took me half an hour to eat it. I had no worries... I wasn't worried about fame, honour, about profit... so that cake of my childhood is a souvenir. All of us have lived moments like that, when we are not craving for anything, not regretting anything. We are not asking ourselves philosophical questions like "*Who am I?*" Are we able to eat a cake like that now? Drink a cup of tea like that? Enjoy ourselves in our environment? We come to Plum Village to learn to do these things again, the things which we thought we could no longer do. We have come to learn how to walk again. To walk solidly, like a free person, without spirits chasing after us. We have come here to learn how to sit. To sit at ease as if we are sitting on a lotus flower, not sitting on hot coals. Sitting on hot coals, we just jump up and down the whole time – we lose all our peace. Here, we learn how to breathe, how to smile; we learn how to cook. Our mother taught us how to eat, how to drink, how to stand up, how to walk, how to speak... everything! Now we have to learn these things over again. We

have to be born again in the light of the true Dharma, the true teachings of the Buddha.

We are going to study the *Sutra on Shining the Light*. This is not a Sutra spoken by the Buddha, it is a Sutra spoken by Mahamoggallana. It is in the canon and in the canon we see there are sutras not only spoken by the Buddha, but also spoken by the disciples of the Buddha. We are very happy about this, because we see the continuation of the Buddha right in the life time of the Buddha. Often after his disciples had given teachings, the Buddha would praise them and say, "If I had spoken, I would have said exactly the same...", so we see how the Buddha supported and encouraged his students and we see how the continuation of the Buddha was there, even in the lifetime of the Buddha. The original name of this sutra; was *Anumana*, which means '*Measuring and Reflecting*', it is very necessary for monks and nuns. In the Chinese canon, it is called the *Sutra on Inviting*. Besides Shariputra, Mahamoggallana, Ananda and Katyayana, there are nuns, such as Dharmadhina, who gave talks. These talks by nuns have also been recorded in the Sutras.

#### SUTRA ON MEASURING AND REFLECTING: (Wednesday Evening)

*Thus have I heard. At one time the Venerable Mahamoggallana was staying with the Bhagga people in Sumsumaragira, in the Deer Park in the Bhesakala grove. The Venerable Mahamoggallana addressed the bhikkhus: "Dharma friends." "Yes friend", they replied to the Venerable Mahamoggallana. The Venerable Mahamoggallana spoke as follows:*

*"It is possible that a monk should make the following request: "Speak to me, Reverend Monks." If he is difficult to speak to, endowed with qualities which make him difficult to deal with, intolerant, not good at grasping what is taught, then those who practice the path of sublime conduct with him will think he is not one to be spoken to, he is not one to be instructed, he is not someone we can have confidence in. What are the qualities which make someone difficult to approach?"*

We should know that Mahamoggallana was one of those who had a part in building the Sangha. Shariputra and Mahamoggallana were given the role of building Sangha, so that the Sangha would have happiness. Of course, there were other monks beside Shariputra and Mahamoggallana who also practiced Sangha-building. However, we know that these were the two monks who played that role most of all. We know that when Shariputra passed away, Ananda could not stand up because the passing away of Shariputra left a huge gap in the Sangha. When we study the sutra, we see how, in the time of Buddha, there were monks in the Sangha who did not go along with the Sangha. There were people whose behaviour did not allow other monks to approach them and to help them, so these people lived like a drop of oil in a bowl of water. They could not make progress and they could not bring happiness to themselves or the Sangha and, aware of this, Mahamoggallana gave this teaching, so that everyone in the Sangha could practice. When we live in the Sangha and there is harmony, we can enjoy ourselves, we can talk to anybody in the Sangha and be happy, and we can also make others happy. But if we are not able to communicate with other members of the Sangha, if nobody wants to be close to us, then we are isolated and when we are isolated we cannot be happy and we cannot make the Sangha happy.

In the past, there was a practice of silence... that is, it is like 'putting into Coventry', to 'isolate'. We don't talk to that person at all, and in the temple they practiced that. They used the method of isolating that person, as that person causes suffering to happen in the Sangha. Everybody is silent with regard to that person; they don't talk to that person. But in the practice of Plum Village, we have never needed to use the practice of isolation as we have other methods. When we isolate someone, it is as if we have given up hope in that person. We feel we cannot teach that person any more. In the beginning, people try their best to help the person, but after a while they give up hope. They say that there is no benefit for that person to stay here and there is no benefit for us for that person to stay here and so they use the final practice they can use, and that is to isolate that person. So we know that practice is the final effort and it really shows that the Sangha has failed and the person who was isolated has failed as well. Isolation means we have failed, we are defeated, we have no capacity to intervene in order to help that person and to help the Sangha.

In the past they didn't talk about 'shining the guiding light', which is what we practice today. But, in fact, the practice of shining the guiding light did exist in the time of the Buddha. In the practice of the Parivara ceremony, the monks would shine lights on each others practice, but in Plum Village we practice shining light in the practice throughout the year, not just once a year. Before someone receives the precepts, before someone becomes a dharmacharya, during retreats and at the end of retreats, we practice 'shining the guiding light'. If we've practiced this 'shining the guiding light' it means that we haven't given up and that we intervene with the strength of the Sangha in order to help. If one person shines light, it is not enough to help that person transform, but if the whole Sangha shines the light, it is. Imagine there is someone in the Sangha who is isolated and will not listen to anyone else and nobody likes to come to that person and help them. If we allow that situation to continue a long time, until we have no other way but to practice isolation - it is a great shame. It is a great shame for the Sangha and a great shame for the person who is isolated, so we need to have another method to use and that is 'shining guiding light'.

In the sutra, Mahamoggallana suggests methods – not just for one person, but for everyone in the Sangha to use. Because we do not want to become a part of the Sangha which no one dares to approach, because we haven't got the capacity to listen deeply, because we have very heavy habit energies which we follow without knowing that we're making others suffer. When we live in a Sangha, we take refuge in that Sangha and we make use of that Sangha to encourage us, to support us and teach us. If we isolate ourselves, if we don't know how to obey, if we are not easy to speak to, even though our brothers and sisters want to help us, they cannot and finally we have to leave our Sangha. It is a great shame for us, and a great shame for our Sangha. So, when we read the Sutra, we can learn from Mahamoggallana and we can apply what we learn in our daily life. At the same time, we are able to see the methods which, in the time of the Buddha, Mahamoggallana taught and which, today, we are still practicing in Plum Village and which we can contribute to future generations for their practice, without having to use the method called isolation. Mahamoggallana brings up the reasons which make it impossible for us to be able to talk to someone set apart in the Sangha. *If he has wrong desires and is controlled by his wrong desires*, that is the reason which makes it difficult for us to talk to him. In the most recent English version it says; *A bhikkhu has evil wishes and is dominated by evil wishes...* I have translated 'evil wishes' as 'wrong desires'. In Chinese, it means some sort of infatuation - some sort of attachment.

When a part of a Sangha is overwhelmed by an attachment and it stops the rest of the Sangha from being able to approach that person, we don't want anybody to mention to us that we are attached. We have some kind of attachment to another person in the Sangha or a person outside the Sangha and the Sangha knows about it. Some people may have come and have pointed it out to us, but we always try to avoid it, we don't want the help of the Sangha. This attachment is the first reason that Mahamoggallana gives as a reason which makes it impossible for the Sangha to be able to approach us and talk to us. This brother, this sister, is caught in their attachment and therefore the Sangha cannot approach them and help them. Are we in that situation? Do we have some wrong desire, some wrong attachment that is going to isolate us, just as it has isolated the other person in the Sangha? That is called 'looking in the mirror' - we see that others who have been attached have been isolated, and they cannot accept whenever anybody comes to encourage them to do differently. So the first thing which makes it difficult for the Sangha to approach us and talk to us is when we are caught in a wrong attachment. It means that our attachment is unwholesome. It is an attachment with another person in the Sangha, or somebody outside the Sangha.

The second reason is that he only knows how to praise himself and criticize others. *The bhikkhu who praises himself and despises others is difficult to approach*. There are people who only want their self-pride to be protected and they haven't the capacity to praise anybody else in the Sangha, except themselves. They can only talk about the weaknesses of other people. They have no capacity to praise others in the Sangha. That has happened - it happens in all of the hamlets. There are people who have never opened their mouth to praise one of their brothers or sisters. They only wait until their brothers and sisters have some weakness or short-coming and then they talk about it, and if somebody can't see our good points and praise our good points, then we cannot bear it. We don't have the capacity to praise anyone else, we don't have the capacity to 'water the flowers' of others, and we cannot speak well of others. Standing before that person we cannot talk about their positive things, and we cannot talk about their positive things to other people either, if we are like that then we will be isolated in our Sangha. This is someone who really wants to be praised. Everybody has positive and negative points, but some people only want to talk about the negative things of other people, they're very stingy, very mean. We know that the other person has short-comings and they have to transform those short-comings, but we have to be able to see the positive things in that person too. Sometimes we just see the unwholesome things and they blind us to the wholesome things in that person. The other person has made us suffer one time and when we look at that person, all we see is that one time they made us suffer. We are unable to see all the goodness and sweetness they have contributed to the Sangha. We are never able to open our mouth to praise people.

Now, when we see somebody like that in the Sangha, we come back to ourselves and we ask ourselves – "Am I like that? Am I someone who just sees the faults of others and am I not able to see or talk about the good points in other people?" And when someone just wants to be praised and wants to despise others, we see that person and we ask ourselves, "Am I like that? Do I want to be isolated because I'm like that?" If we have some prejudice about one of our brothers or sisters, we have to practice and ask ourselves the question: *"Besides the weaknesses I see in that person, have*

*they any strengths?"* And we have to number those strengths. When I talk to another person about that person, can I talk about the good points of that person to others, and if I can't then I'm isolating myself. Or, in the case of a person who is easily angered... *A bhikkhu who is angry and who is mastered by his anger is difficult to approach.* Maybe we don't have a very cruel nature, but we may get angry very easily. People get tired of that and they don't want to get near us, they don't dare talk to us. They don't want to have a conversation with us because we get angry so easily. We are easily mastered by our anger and that means we cannot be master of ourselves when we are in that state. When somebody gets angry easily and cannot be master of themselves, they are easily isolated and other parts of the Sangha don't dare come near that person, to converse with them, to help them. But we have to ask ourselves – if somebody else in the Sangha is like that, am I like that too? Do I easily get angry? Am I easily mastered by my anger?

The fourth reason is the bhikkhu who is angry and because of his anger he bears a grudge and is difficult to approach. There's some people who, once they have gotten angry, forget everything... they are not angry anymore. But there are the people who get angry and then they bear a grudge afterwards and the light of their eyes and their words and their way of behavior makes us want to go and sit somewhere else. Because he holds a grudge, we avoid that person as if he were a leper. He doesn't manifest his anger in an expressive way, but holds that grudge and that grudge influences his way of speech, his way of thinking and his actions. When we bear a grudge like that the Sangha will not want to talk to us. A bhikkhu is angry and because of his anger he talks unkindly and people don't dare come near him because of this and so he's isolated. He gets angry and it shows on his face and in his speech that he is angry and when we speak in an angry way, people don't dare come near us.

A bhikkhu who, when corrected, corrects in turn the one who has corrected him, is difficult to approach. Instead of saying *"Thank you for having pointed out my fault to me"*, he corrects that person in return. When you say *"You think you are better than me, do you?"*, or *"I know I didn't close the door in mindfulness, but your lack of mindfulness is even greater than mine"*... if we say something like that then that person won't correct us any more. If two or three people correct us and we act like that then nobody will want to correct us any more and we will be isolated. We have to look and see if we're like that because we must not become an element of the Sangha like that. A bhikkhu, who, when corrected, disparages the one who corrected him is difficult to approach. Disparages means, *"Your practice is so bad already and you don't look after your own practice... all you think about is other peoples faults..."*

The ninth thing is – a bhikkhu who, when corrected, retorts, is difficult to approach. We see that the person is trying to help us, but we also want to blame them in return... so the advice of the others is not received by us and no-one will dare to approach us. Sometimes the other person doesn't really show us the mistake we have made. They are talking about something else, but because we have an internal formation, thinking that people are going to criticize us, when they say something we think they are criticizing us even when they're not. So we disparage that other person, we retort to that other person, even though that person isn't even trying to correct us. We think that people are taking a devious route in order to criticize us, when in fact they are not even talking about us at all.

The tenth thing is a bhikkhu who, when corrected, evades the question by asking another or changes the subject. He evades the question by asking other questions. There are people like that. So, a bhikkhu, who, when corrected, evades the question by asking another changes the subject. He acts in a 'gross' way... somebody whose actions are 'gross' has evil intention and nobody wants to come near him. Someone who is jealous and sulky may make people afraid of them and if we have these characteristics they will avoid us. A person who is jealous does not know how to share the merit and cannot practice no-self. When they see the other person is happy... the other person is loved and valued, they cannot bear it. They ask *"Why am I not valued? Why am I not loved? The other person is loved, is valued... has that person done something such as saying unkind things about me behind my back which has made them valued and made me not valued?"* But if we see there are people around us who are loved and valued, it should make us happy because that person is my brother, my sister, and when they are happy I can share their happiness. Being able to do that makes me light and fresh and we know that when another is light and fresh, we are also. When we are light and fresh, we are loved and we are valued, but if we are jealous then we lose all our fresh-ness and all our light-ness and therefore we are not able to enjoy or profit from the good qualities of others. Therefore, jealousy can destroy our happiness and the happiness of the Sangha and make it impossible for others to be able to approach us. That kind of person is unmindful...

## ***Sutra on Measuring & Reflecting:Contd***

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Dear Friends,

Today is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 1998 and we are in the New Hamlet. We are studying the Sutra on Shining Light, which is found in the chanting book on Wednesday evening. *Friends, one should infer one's own state by considering the state of others in the following way. A person who has wrong desires and is controlled by wrong desires, I do not find it easy to like. If I had wrong desires and were controlled by these wrong desires, others would not find me easy to like. My friends, a monk who knows this decides, "May I not have wrong desires and not be controlled by these wrong desires". That is also true in other cases such as exalting myself and despising others, being angry, and being mastered by my anger.* This is the method which Master Mahamoggallana suggests to his friends in the practice.

We see in our Sangha somebody who is attached, who is caught in sensual desire. The Sangha sees clearly that that person is attached and is not free. Whenever people come and try and talk about that person's weak points, that person is angry. Nobody wants to shine light on that person. When we see someone like that, that person is difficult for us to deal with. We should shine light on that person. If we want to be easy to deal with, if we want the Sangha to approach us, teach us, shine light on us, we have to give up being caught up in wrong desire, in attachment. This is what Mahamoggallana talks about as one of nineteen cases which make it difficult to approach someone.

One thing not mentioned in the sutra, is the seeds of these weaknesses. We all have these weaknesses in us.

Another person may have a weakness that manifests very obviously in them. In us that seed may be quite weak, but it's still there. If we don't practice mindfulness, if we allow that seed to be watered, it will grow and we will be caught in difficulties like the other person we look at in our Sangha. We may say that that person is caught, is embracing wrong desires, is attached, and we think that we are not attached. Maybe people look at us and they see that we are not attached, see that we are not caught in wrong desires, but it doesn't mean to say the seed of attachment isn't in us. We are just lucky. The seed of wrong desire and attachment in us hasn't been watered and it hasn't manifested, but if we are not mindful that seed can be watered and we will become isolated in our Sangha like this person.

This is the second part that is not mentioned in the sutra. We should practice a little further and say, "No, I don't have wrong desire at the moment. I am not embracing wrong desire at the moment. I am not attached, but the seed of attachment and wrong desire is still in me, in the depths of consciousness, so I should practice with all my might so that that seed is not watered. I am fortunate; I am luckier than the other person, that that seed is still small. And I give an aspiration to feel compassion for the other person who is caught in wrong desire. I am ready to do anything I can to help that person." We compare ourselves with another person, saying "That person has been isolated because that person is caught in wrong desire, and I don't want to be caught in wrong desire because I don't want to be isolated." Then we have to go to the second layer of practice. That person has a sense of attachment and wrong desire. I also have the seed of attachment, and although fortunately in me that seed is very small, I don't feel that I am completely secure. I don't despise the other person. I try to find a way to help that person. I don't continue in the attitude of avoiding that person but I try to help that person to open up, to develop, so they are free from their attachment. This is the second layer of practice which is not mentioned in the sutra.

We can go through all these nineteen factors in this way. Maybe we see somebody else in the Sangha who only knows how to praise themselves and is always prepared to criticize others. Am I like that? We are looking at ourselves—somebody who is severe, and is not capable of opening their lips in order to praise someone else. If we're like that, we should recognize we're like that. Do I just want to be praised, and I have I not got the capacity to receive constructive criticism from my friends? Am I someone, who for all these years, has not

been able to open myself to praise somebody? If we see that we are like that we should be ashamed and we should straight away practice in order to get out of that habit. Maybe nobody has told us this yet because we haven't the capacity to receive constructive criticism.

So this is the practice of shining light. We look at somebody in the Sangha and ask ourselves if we are like that person. Maybe we are a twin of that person. We are exactly like that person. When we look at that person we see ourselves, and when we see ourselves we have to practice straight away to change the situation. We have a weakness and we know we have that weakness. Whenever we see that we have a weakness, we accept that we have that weakness. That is awakening; that is enlightenment. Our success in the practice is due to these moments of enlightenment. "I have that weakness and I accept that I have that weakness."

For example, we ask ourselves, "Am I someone who just likes to be praised? Am I someone who is totally afraid of hearing the truth about myself?" We ask ourselves that question because in the Sangha there are people like that, and am I one of those people? In the Sangha there is someone who is not able to open their lips to praise someone in front of another. Am I like that? That is a question; that is an observation that we have to make, to recognize the seeds in us. We have the seeds, but is it a great important seed or is it a small seed? That depends on the conditions and causes which have made it small or great. If that seed is an important seed in us, we should recognize that we have it, and that it is already well-developed in us, and that we have to practice with that seed.

Other people, although they like to be praised, have the capacity to receive constructive criticism from others. They don't praise others a lot, but from time to time they have the capacity to talk about the positive elements in their friends. They also know that when they see unwholesome things in others, they have that unwholesome thing in themselves. If we don't practice, the unwholesome seed—of praising ourselves, of criticizing others, of being unable to receive constructive criticism—will grow in us, and we will have it in the future. This is how to practice looking in the mirror.

Next we look deeply into getting angry and being mastered by anger. In the Sangha there are people who easily get angry and easily get carried away by their anger. We all see that person and everybody feels sorry for that person. Everybody avoids that person, because when they get angry we receive the anger from them. So we look into the mirror of that person to see, "Do I have that quality; am I someone who easily gets angry? Am I easily carried away by my anger?" If so then we have to really practice to get out of that situation.

Now we come to the fourth situation of someone who bears a grudge; their anger lasts for a long time. Maybe their ears and their face don't go red when they're angry; they don't say heavy things, but they are not able to let go of their anger, and the anger goes on from day to day, from month to month. Other people get angry and are mastered by anger, but after twenty-four hours they have forgotten their anger. There are people like that in our Sangha, and they come and say they are sorry to the other. Such a person is easier to bear than the one whose anger carries on from month to month, from year to year, a person who pollutes our mind with their anger, darkens our mind with their anger. We should ask ourselves, "Am I someone whose anger continues for a long time?" We should look at ourselves in the mirror of the person who gets angry for a long time. Do we bear our grudges for a long time, or have we the capacity to let go?

[Bell]

In the book of the Flowers in the Garden of Meditation, there are histories of different masters. One master says if a monk gets angry he should not keep his anger over more than one night. In Vietnam children say "angry, sad, or annoyed for five minutes." We have the right to be angry or sad, but five minutes is enough. The master of the Flowers in the Garden of Meditation gives us the right to be angry all night, but the next morning our anger should have finished. In the Upper Hamlet, the New Hamlet, you know how to say this in Chinese, you can write it up if you like for people to see. Sometimes we bear a grudge, keep our resentment, and that resentment manifests in our actions and our words, because we don't know how to transform it. It may manifest in a very subtle way, in the way we speak. There are people who speak in a very grumpy way, their words are unkind and bitter, but don't know that they're doing it. Only if they heard a recording of themselves, would they think that they were speaking in a grumpy way. We may think that we're speaking just like everybody else, but in fact we're speaking in a reprimanding, angry way. The element of anger is in our speech without us knowing it. In the *Sutra on Looking in the Mirror* we practice with that. We can read it every week so we can look into the mirror at ourselves. If we are just thinking when we chant, "Does it sound good or not?" we don't get to the meaning of the sutra. We don't look into the mirror of ourselves. Actually when we read the sutra, we should be looking into the mirror of ourselves. If we can't do that while we're chanting, we should read the sutra on our own. These are a few examples of looking into the mirror. Now we go on.

*My friends, this is how bhikkhus should reflect on themselves. Do I have wrong desires, and am I in the control of wrong desires?* What the sutra means by "inference", is looking carefully, looking deeply. It is the original title of this sutra. It also means the resources, the provisions we take with us on the journey. In one of the meditation schools in China they use this word *provisions*. It means you are thinking about the thing you cannot think about. How can you think about what is unthinkable? To conceive the inconceivable; how can you conceive something that is inconceivable? *If while inferring from the other, looking at the other, the bhikkhu thinks, "I do have wrong desires and I am controlled by wrong desires", he should try to abandon...* We have the seeds of all the nineteen, but maybe we are caught in four or five of them. If we see we are caught in one of these nineteen situations, we have to reflect in order to be enlightened. We are caught in one, two, three, or four of these, but if we are caught only in one of them then that's better than being caught in many.

*But if he sees; "I am not controlled by wrong desire," then he feels joyful and he knows that he has to practice day and night, training in what is beneficial.* This means that Moggallana has seen the second layer of the practice. We see we are not caught in that at the moment but we know we have to practice more so that in the future we will continue not to be caught in these things. We have to transform the seed even though it is very small in us.

*I do not have wrong desires and I am not controlled by wrong desires. Then he can joyfully let go and he trains in what is beneficial.* He knows he has to practice diligently to increase in the beneficial so the seed doesn't have an opportunity to manifest. We have to practice diligently just like that. We are making a ditch and we are making a wall, but we are still not sure if the ditch is deep enough and the wall is high enough to keep people out; therefore we have to keep digging more and more and building higher and higher. This is also true of other cases like praising oneself and despising others, being angry, or being controlled by anger.

*My friends, if while reflecting a bhikkhu sees that he has not yet given up these unbeneficial qualities, he makes an effort to give them up.* If we see we have one of these nineteen, we have to get down to the practice. *If when reflecting he sees he has given up all these unbeneficial qualities, then he is joyful but knows he has to practice diligently day and night in these beneficial qualities.* If we see we are caught in these things we have to practice, but if we see we are not caught we also have to practice. We are not isolated; we are not suffering because of attachment. We don't have the fault of praising no-one but ourselves, we don't get angry, we don't speak in anger. We know we don't do these things now but we know that in the future we may be caught in these things, so we practice to be sure.

So this section is talking about the Four Right Efforts. If things that are unwholesome have not arisen, don't allow them to arise. If unwholesome things have already arisen, act in such a way that you can transform them. If wholesome things have not yet arisen, work so that they can arise; and if wholesome things have already arisen, help them to stay with you. This is what is meant by diligence, the Four Right Efforts. Although he doesn't use those words here, what Moggallana is talking about is the Four Right Efforts. He gives the image of someone looking in a mirror and that's why we give the sutra the name, The Sutra on Looking in the Mirror. *It's like when a young man or woman who is fond of adorning himself contemplates his face in a clear mirror or a bowl of limpid water. If he sees dirt or a blemish there he tries to clean that dirt or blemish. If he sees no dirt or blemish, he thinks to himself, it is good, my face is clean. So my friends, if a bhikkhu reflects and sees that all these unwholesome qualities have not yet been given up then he makes an effort to give them all up. If he sees that he has given them all up he lets go with joy and day and night trains to nourish the beneficial qualities. The Venerable Maha Mogallana had spoken. The venerable bhikkhus were delighted with his words.*

According to this sutra our daily practice is a practice of looking in the mirror. We all like to be beautiful, so we have to look in the mirror. But this is not a mirror we buy in the supermarket, this mirror is the mirror of mindfulness.

### *The Chant On Joyfully Sharing The Merit:*

Now we are going to read The Chant On Joyfully Sharing The Merit.

The word *tui* here means following in accordance with, participating in, identifying with joy. When we see something beautiful, good, or happy in another, we see that person has understanding, love, happiness, and our heart follows that, supports that, and is in agreement with that. Our friend for example is able to smile and that smile brightens up their face. We feel happy because our friend is able to smile. Our friend is praised by our teacher; our friend is praised by other brothers and sisters; our friend practices diligently and transforms. We feel happy. We support that practice in our friend and our joy follows that person's joy. Whatever positive thing happens around us, we are happy about it and if we are able to be joyful because of other people's happiness, then our happiness will increase a hundred times. It's a very easy method of practice. I say it's very easy, maybe I'm not right. It's a practice which can bring us a lot of happiness—that's what I want to say. We don't have to do a lot because these little happinesses happen around us every day. If we know how to follow along, how to rejoice in these little merits of other people, we will have a lot of happiness. If we don't know how to do that, we will be a jealous person. Jealousy is a hell. Attachment is hell and jealousy is a second hell. So why do we choose these two things? Why don't we choose the paradise of rejoicing in the merit of others? So among our brothers and sisters if somebody is able to realize something in the practice, then *we* should rejoice. Then their happiness becomes our happiness too. The person whose merit we rejoice in may not even be as happy as we are; we may be happier than they are. But if we cannot make small realizations how can we make great realizations?

Say that one of our friends has been in the hell of sorrow for these past months and today she is able to smile. That is paradise, the opening of the door of paradise. Why don't we celebrate that? Why don't we celebrate our friend's transformation? Then we will be able to protect our friend. Now you have been able to get out of these days of darkness, and I am so happy for you. And our brother is learning Chinese and is praised by the teacher. Even though my Chinese is not praised by the teacher, when I hear that my friend's Chinese is praised I feel very happy. My brother's success becomes my happiness, and that gives me energy, the energy of sharing the merit. All these happinesses, all these successes, of myself and of those around me, I bring and I transfer. I direct to a very beautiful goal called transferring the merits. Each step, each smile, every Chinese character I am able to learn, every affliction I am able to transform, all these things are merit. We should not offer up the merit of these things to something which is not worthy of it being offered to. We should find the most wonderful thing to offer up the merit to, and not offer it to small goals. We have to find the goal of our merit. There is a lot of merit, and the merit that we produce every day, that our brothers and sisters produce every day... what are we to offer it up to, transfer it to? It must be something worthy. This is the teaching of this chant.

Say we do sitting meditation very diligently; we chant the sutra very diligently and we want everybody to *know* that we're doing this. We want to be praised for doing this. This is the wrong kind of transferring the merit. If we practice only because we want to be praised, what a waste, because to practice diligently is to give great joy, a wonderful joy for us. Actually meditation and chanting are already a great joy and we don't need to be praised for it, because that practice itself gives us joy. If we do these practices just to be praised, then we direct merit to being praised only. When we do this, we haven't anything left to offer up to the highest aim of our life. If we say something very deep and beautiful and no one else knows about it, we can offer that up. If we feel arrogant about this, saying "Aren't I worthy of being praised," then all the merit of the high thing we said is just directed towards our pride. That joy which results is very small. It's not worthy of offering the merit to.

For example, we give a good Dharma talk. We feel very well that we've given that Dharma talk because we've encouraged so many people to transform. We are happy for the Dharma. We are happy for the Buddha. We are happy for the transformation of people. If we expect when we give a good Dharma talk that people will say, "Oh teacher, you gave a wonderful talk, I've never heard such a wonderful talk as that." The joy that comes is a very small joy; it just belongs to the field of the superiority complex, like when merit is offered up only for our fame or our profit. Offering merit up to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the transformation of many people is immeasurable merit. When merit is offered up to the highest goal, then it is immeasurable merit. When we are wiping the bowls, when we are cleaning the floor, then we do that with joy because we love the Sangha. We want the Sangha to have an opportunity to rest. That is why we are giving extra time to do the cleaning up ourselves, so that when people come they will see a clean kitchen. When we clean the kitchen like that we have a lot of happiness. If we work just because we are being forced to work, it's not the same. But now we are working because we want to work, not because somebody's forcing us to, so we feel very well. If we are just doing it because we want to be praised, and people come and say, "Oh, aren't you wonderful? Everybody's gone to bed and you're doing it all on your own," if we just do it for that then there's no merit.

A man hears that the temple is about to build a new Dharma Hall. He puts on a beautiful robe, goes in his car to the temple, and offers a hundred thousand gold pieces to build the new Dharma Hall. The man says to the abbot, "Here are a hundred thousand gold pieces I offer for the Dharma Hall." And the abbot just bows and receives it and continues to talk to the other monks. Then he sees that he is not being highly respected for his great gift. He's waiting for special treatment; he wants to be welcomed in special ways, and when he sees he's just being treated like anybody else, he's not happy. He sits but he won't listen to what the teacher is talking about to the other monks. He just sits there and says, "Look, there's the money I gave you," and an hour later he says, "Look, look. There's a hundred thousand gold pieces I have given you." Then he says, "A hundred thousand gold pieces is an awful lot. A *hundred* gold pieces is a lot." At last the abbot says, "Oh, do you want me to thank you? Really you should be the person thanking me, because if you give money you have a lot of merit. That merit will be greatly diminished if you just give money to be thanked."

When Bodhidharma came from India to China, the emperor talked just like that. He said, "Master I have constructed so many temples; I have cast so many statues in bronze; I have cast so many bells. Do I have a lot of merit?" And Bodhidharma said, "No merit at all, because the only reason you did these things was to offer up the merit to your own pride." We have to offer up the merit to the highest, the most beautiful things, not the small things like the words of praise. [Bell] This chant on sharing the merit has four parts. The first part is repentance, the second is offering up the merit, the third is making a deep aspiration and the fourth is the conclusion. Now we're going to read the first part, on repentance. *All you All you blessed Ones who dwell in the world, show your compassion to us.* We could think that the Buddha has gone, has passed away, but when we read this we should see the presence of all Buddhas with us right here. *World-*

*Honored One, please show your compassion to us.* I'm someone who needs your compassion. We have to see that. We have to see we have weaknesses; we have made mistakes; we have suffering. We really need the energy of compassion. "I need the compassion of my brothers. I need the compassion of my sisters. I need the compassion of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas." *Because in this very life and in many past lives from beginningless time we have made mistakes which have caused suffering to ourselves and to others.* We accept the truth that we have brought about suffering. First of all we have made ourselves suffer, and after that we have made others suffer, and all these sufferings, all these mistakes, come from our ignorance.

*In this very life and in many past lives from beginningless time we have made mistakes.* Our wrong perceptions have caused suffering to ourselves and to others. We have done wrong ourselves or bidden others to do wrong, or we have given our consent to wrongdoing. These mistakes may have been made by ourselves, or we may have asked someone else—a friend, a brother, a sister, a child—to do these things. We have pushed them. And if we push someone to do something wrong by words or by ideas or by our physical actions, then we bear the result as much as if we had done the thing ourselves. We have influenced that other person, so we have participated in the wrongdoing of the other person even though we haven't done it ourselves. Even if we haven't pushed someone else to do it, when we've seen someone else do it, if we haven't reacted against it or done anything about it, then we are also a participator. On a train there is someone who is beating someone else and we just allow that person to go on doing it. We just sit there and do nothing about it. This is the wrongdoing of *not* intervening. Not intervening is also wrongdoing. If we see someone being killed and we don't do anything, we are also doing something wrong. We are giving our consent in a way. We can't say that it's not our business, because we are not a stone; we are not an animal; we are a human being with a mind. We cannot allow things to happen like this, and so this is called the wrongdoing of not intervening or of giving our consent.

These are all our responsibility; we are always responsible in these cases for killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, deception, and other harmful misactions. The five infractions of the Five Mindfulness Trainings are among the ten deeds which are called unwholesome. As far as our body is concerned, there are three unwholesome actions. As far as our speech is concerned, there are four unwholesome actions. And as far as our mind is concerned there are three unwholesome actions. These are called the ten unwholesome actions. The three unwholesome actions of the body are killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. The four which belong to speech are lying, exaggerating, speaking cruel language, and speaking with two tongues. The three to do with the mind are greed, anger and ignorance, also called

craving, hatred and ignorance. If we do these ten things they are called the ten wrong actions, or the ten unwholesome actions. And if we don't do these things then it is called acting in ten wholesome ways. There is a sutra called *The Way of the Ten Wholesome Actions Sutra*. The Five Mindfulness Trainings contain the ten wholesome actions. When we analyze the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings we see that they also are the practice of the ten wholesome actions. And actually the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings come from the ten wholesome actions.

Whether we hide unwholesome actions or they are known to others, they have brought us to the hell realms. Sometimes we do something wrong and we hide it from others, and sometimes we do wrong things and we don't hide it from others. Either of these kind of wrong actions will take us along the dark paths of the lower realms. We are led by these wrong actions along dark paths to dark destinations, to the hell realms, the hungry ghost realms, and the animal realms. *These greatest dark paths cause us to be born in uncivilized places, faraway frontier places where there is no civilization, no freedom, no law. The light of freedom, democracy, and morality has not entered these far away places. The call of human rights is not heard there. When we are born in these places we do not have the opportunity to be human in its fullest sense: we cannot go to school; we cannot be in touch with morality; we cannot be in touch with the practice and be directed in the practice. These are called the uncivilized places.*

We may live a life with no civilization, or we may have impaired sense organs. Maybe we are blind; we are deaf; we are dumb so we cannot chant the sutras, or we are insane so we cannot really hear what is being taught. One of our five senses is impaired because we have done things in the past which were unwholesome, so we don't have the opportunity to realize our full human potential. We see there are young people who are born in dark areas with no democracy, no love, no education, no social justice. They can't go to school, can't be educated in how to love, and they become bandits. That is the karma of those young people. It is also the collective karma, our karma and their karma, that has brought about living conditions of great difficulty like that. We sit here in conditions which are very favorable to the practice. We are able to be in touch with Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, with democracy, with civilization. But there are children—hundreds, thousands, *millions* of children who have been born in situations of no freedom, no democracy, no opportunity to learn how to read and write. Father is drunk; Mother is not educated and does not know how to bring up children; everyone in the village is evil. Therefore the person cannot grow to realize their full human potential. These are the kind of unfortunate conditions we can be born in. That is not just the karma of the young children but it is also our karma, also our doing. We practice today so that we will be able to help children like this. We can be compassionate. Now there are millions of children like this—we have to practice in such a way that we can intervene and save these children from the hell in which they are living.

*These obstacles of wrongdoing I am determined with one-pointed concentration to repent today.* Nobody can claim to be pure. No one has the right to say, "I have not done these wrong things." We have all contributed to the making of hells. We cannot say we are not responsible. If there are children living in hells like this, I know that I have lived in an irresponsible way and I have not contributed to dismantling hells that are existing, whether in Africa or in Asia or in the great cities in the west such as Los Angeles and New York. These hells are present in Manila, in Saigon, in Bangkok. There are hells all over. We can call them "frontier regions," where people grow up but they can't realize their full potential as human beings. So now I join my palms and say, "I know I am responsible for some of this and I repent of it, I vow to live responsibly so that in the future I can help these children. I need your compassion, the compassion of my teachers, of my brothers, of my sisters, of the Buddha. I have woken up and I have seen that my responsibility is great."

The second part of the chant on sharing merit, after repentance, is the offering up of merit. In the past we have done wrong things which have brought about suffering, but in the past we have also done things to bring about merit. That is what is wonderful about this chant. *Blessed Ones, be our witness. Think compassionately of us.* We are surrendering ourselves before all the Buddhas. We are being embraced by the energy of love, compassion and understanding. We are in the embrace of the Buddhas and the bodhisattvas, who open their arms with compassion and understanding and embrace us as the practitioner who is surrendering before them. We surrender ourselves before you and make this aspiration: *If in numberless past lives or in this very life we have practiced giving, even if only a handful of food or a simple coat; if we have ever spoken kindly, even if only a few words; if we have ever looked with the eyes of compassion, even if only for a moment...* Now we return to the past, return to the future, to see that in the past and the future we have not only done things which are wrong but we have also done positive things. Yesterday for example we saved an ant that was about to be trod on. That is the action of a bodhisattva. Yesterday we knew how to look on our sister or brother with the eyes of compassion. The day before yesterday we gave away some of our clothes to someone who was cold. That is the action of a bodhisattva.

Now we return to be in touch with actions of bodhisattvas which we ourselves have done. That is what is good about this chant. *If in numberless past lives or in this very life we have practiced giving...* We must have practiced giving, even though it is not very great giving like the great bodhisattvas' giving. Have we ever given somebody who was hungry something to eat, even if only a handful of food? Yes, we must have done, in the present life and in the past life. We have brought a grain of rice for a bird. From time to time we give fish and birds rice or bread just for fun, we just want to enjoy seeing them come up to us. That isn't really generosity, that's just called having fun. It's generosity when we see that the bird is hungry in the winter and we make a little house for it to live in and we give it food to eat. That is generosity. Instead of buying fish to steam or fry and eat, we buy fish and turtles to release in the river. In the past monks used to do that. They went to the market, bought turtles and fish, got in the boat, rowed them out to the middle of the lake, set them free, and then chanted the refuges for them. My disciples did that to increase the lifespan of their teachers. They did this for snails. If you buy live snails, then the snail won't have to be boiled and then put on a skewer. He can go back to his life. People do that because they love their teacher. They hope that will bring long life to their teacher.

I think that Western people should learn this practice. On the birthday of your mother or your father or someone you love, instead of killing a chicken, save a life. Buy birds or fish and let them go. But be careful, because sometimes you let the fish and the birds go and they die, because they are only able to live in certain environments. If we free them in environments they can't live in... We have to use our intelligence. We should only buy birds and fish that we know will be able to live when we release them. That will bring joy to those we love and also to the fish and birds. So I want the Western people to learn this. Whenever you have a birthday or anniversary to celebrate, instead of eating meat and drinking wine, drink apple juice, buy fish and let them go, and offer up the merit for life. So that the heart of compassion in you can increase.

My Christian friends should practice like that. At Christmas we should not kill the turkey. Instead we should eat vegetarian and release the turkey. How many turkeys are killed at Christmas? When the turkey thinks about Christmas the turkey is very afraid. I think that Jesus Christ did not want us to kill so many turkeys every year. I heard it said the American government sent five hundred thousand turkeys to the American soldiers fighting in Vietnam at Christmas. I think we should find a better way to celebrate the birth of Christ. I'm sure it will make Jesus Christ very joyful if we can find a better way to celebrate. Instead of killing birds we can give them back their freedom. I'm sure when I say this that Jesus Christ is content with these words. Our celebrations, our birthdays, the birth of our mother, our father, our brother... We should practice generosity on these days. We should practice offering joy. How can we offer joy to life? Western people are very intelligent. If they want to, they can organize things very well to bring about joy on these days. I am confident that if Western people are in touch with the compassion of the Buddha, they will practice very well. If I have spoken kindly, even if only a few words today, this is a bit. If you're mean you can't open your mouth to say something kind, but if we're not mean, our mind becomes very light because of the words we speak. We can become a bodhisattva. In the past I have done that and in the present I can do that too. So why don't I continue? It's a wonderful method of practice; it doesn't make us feel guilty but it gives us confidence that *we have* done that, (sharing the merit) and we still have the capacity to do it. *If I have ever looked with the eyes of compassion, even if only for a moment...*

Eyes which are condemning or damning are frightening eyes. We may have used these kind of eyes. But now we have mindfulness; we have *Thay* in our eyes; we have our ancestral teachers in our eyes, so we can look with love on life. *With eyes of love we look on life.* It's a wonderful phrase. So why don't we every day use our eyes of love, looking at our brothers and our sisters, smiling, practicing this? We don't have to go anywhere to practice this. We can practice it right here. If I had known how to look with eyes of love. If I have been able to comfort somebody or console them, even if only a couple of times... Yes, *we have* been able to comfort and console in the past. Sometimes we are imprisoned in our own suffering and we do not have the opportunity, we do not have the energy to do that. That is a great pity. But when we are able to comfort and console, we help the other person and we bring happiness to ourselves. If I've ever listened carefully to the wonderful teachings, even if it was only one Dharma talk. In the past I have heard Dharma talks and now I am listening to the

Dharma, this is an opportunity to open my heart, to allow the rain of the Dharma to water the wholesome seeds in me. We have gone to listen to the teachings. This is immeasurable merit.

*If I have ever offered a meal to monks and nuns, even if only once...* [Bell] Giving a meal to those who practice, what does that give? If you give a good person something to eat, the merit is much more than giving ten evil people something to eat. It doesn't mean we shouldn't give something to eat to people who are not good, but this is a matter of investing. By giving enough to eat to somebody who is good, to somebody who has done many beneficial things for living beings, then we are not only showing love to them but to all the people they help. The idea in the East is that monks and nuns are people who are practicing for us. We are caught in worldly matters and cannot practice properly, so we give food to the monks and nuns so they can practice for us. That is the idea in the East. The matter of giving food, robes, and shelter to monks and nuns has gone very deep into Asian culture. It's a practice to bring the good, the beautiful, and the true into this world. If monks and nuns are not practicing properly, then it's a wrong investment. A monk or a nun has to practice; otherwise they're not a monk or a nun. *If we've ever offered a meal to monks or nuns; if we've ever saved lives, even if only that of ants or worms; if we have recited sutras, even if only one or two lines...* All these things are actions which brought together will make us an Awakened One in the future. These little things we don't think are important may in fact be the causes and conditions that we can become awakened by. You are present here with the Sangha, don't think that this is something of no import. Don't think that being here to hear me teach is something of no import, this is something which comes about because of seeds we have sown in the past. Those seeds we have sown in the past have brought us here to this Dharma talk.

As students of the Buddha, we know that everything is caused and conditioned. Buddhists in Vietnam believe a lot in causes and conditions, if a monk is going by taxi the taxi driver will only take half fare. He thinks that by doing this now, in the future he will have the opportunity, the causes and conditions, for listening to the Dharma. When I went to Taipei I went to a shop and wanted to buy four or five books. The monk who was with me was taking out the money to pay but the bookseller wanted to give me the books free. I didn't want to take them but the other monk said, "Look, this bookseller wants to have the opportunity to be your student in the future. That's why he's giving you the books now, so you should accept them out of compassion for him."

Later I was leading a retreat for six hundred monks and nuns in the Potala Temple. We went to meet the nuns on the mountain and when they saw me coming they were so happy because they had been to the retreat with me before and they liked me very much. They made me a bowl of noodles for my breakfast and put three spoonfuls of oil in it instead of one so that I could eat it. They knelt down before me, and everyone of them offered me a little envelope with one or two piasters in it—worth nothing, maybe 10 or 20 centimes in French money. One nun after the other came and knelt before me. They wanted nothing more than for me to lay my hand on their head, because they thought then in the future they would be born as my disciples. That is what is meant by sowing the causes and conditions. So with all my mindfulness I placed my hand on the head of each nun and I breathed in, and I calmed myself and I breathed out, and I smiled. There were many, many nuns, and when it was time for me to leave to give a Dharma talk there were still nuns left I hadn't laid my hand on. So I said, "if you want to plant the causes and conditions please do walking meditation with me."

So that's the Eastern way of looking at things. Even the smallest thing which we dedicate in the direction of the good and the beautiful—that is a cause and condition of things in the future. If someone whose mind is spaced or agitated goes into the stupa or the temple and says *Namo Buddhaya*, then in the future they will have the opportunity to meet the Dharma and transform, to become a Buddha or a bodhisattva. You just have to say it one time. So if your mind is agitated, dispersed, you go into the stupa, and say *Namo Buddhaya*, then you've already laid down the conditions for being a future bodhisattva or Buddha. Even the smallest action has the capacity to sow the seeds which will make us a Buddha or a bodhisattva in the future. It's a wonderful confidence we have in Buddhism. If we have ever supported others on the path; if we've ever been a monk or a nun, even if only for one life or one day; if we have observed the precepts, even if not perfectly; if we have knelt down and received the Five Mindfulness Trainings, that is already enough. All these things are wholesome roots which we have put down. Wholesome roots are *kusalamula*. We all have these wholesome roots and such actions as these make the wholesome roots increase in our heart. *Gathering wholesome roots together, respectfully we offer them to the Buddhas like a fragrant wreath of flowers.* We all have this fragrant wreath of flowers because there have been small actions we have done in the past. Small thoughts and words have planted seeds in the past and now there are causes and conditions which we may gather together and make into a wreath of flowers to offer to the Buddhas. Don't say we have nothing to offer to the Buddha, we can offer sweet rice or bananas, but the most precious offering we can give is the wholesome roots we have made in the past. *All this merit, the wholesome roots which we have put down, today we gather all this merit together and respectfully offer it to the Buddhas like a fragrant wreath of flowers. We offer it all to contribute to the fruit of highest awakening.* We do not offer this merit up to our fame, our position in society, but up to the fruit of awakening which is called *anuttara samyak bodhi* 'the highest awakening'.

Now we read the third part of the chant, for making aspirations. We want to make our aspiration greater, our intention, our volition, greater. Opening our heart wide we turn to the perfect highest awakening. The thing I want most of all is the highest awakening. To be head of practice, to be abbot, to be a dharma teacher; these are things not worthy of my highest aspiration. The thing I want most of all is the *bodhicitta*, the highest awakening. Only the *bodhicitta* is worthy of my highest aspiration. We are resolved to attain understanding, to realize deep love and compassion. I don't want everyday things, everyday fame, everyday profit. I want something very great. We are resolved to transform our own suffering, to practice diligently, to transform the suffering of all species. All the merits of body, speech, and mind, I want to direct to be part of the happiness of all people and all species. Apart from the *bodhicitta*, apart from the thirst for great understanding, apart from the vow to love deeply, I have no more desires. I touch the earth; I bow down; I say that I don't have any little desires. I reveal everything in me for the Buddha to see. All Buddhas in the ten directions and in the three times have offered up their merit like this. We have learned the ten vows, the aspirations of Samantabhadra. We know how Samantabhadra offered up merit, and all Buddhas have done that too. We also go on the path of these Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and so we offer up the merit too. Today we wish to offer up our merit also. I'm just taking the steps after the Buddha. *We repent of all our faults, and offer up all the merit to the ocean of immeasurable merit and to the towering mountain of highest understanding.* Our highest aim is great understanding, so we offer up all our merit to this great understanding, *Maha Prajna*. The ocean of immeasurable merit is at the same time the towering mountain of highest understanding because all of the good things we have done in the past we offer up to that highest understanding. The Buddhas and the Patriarchal Teachers are the light that shows the way. We see clearly our path. That path has been traversed by the Buddha, by the Patriarchal Teachers, and they light the way of that path for us. In this solemn moment, with all my life's force, I come back to myself to take refuge in the Three Jewels. If I am successful with my life in this lifespan, I will be successful with my next lifespan.

There are people who want to live in order to get revenge. But we want to live in order to relieve the suffering of beings. We'll read again these lines, these lines of aspiration, our highest aspiration, this great understanding. *Opening our heart wide, we turn to the perfect highest awakening. We are resolved to attain understanding, to realize deep love and compassion, to practice diligently, transforming our own suffering and that of all species. All the merits of body, speech, and mind I want to direct to be part of the happiness of all people and all species. That is my deepest desire. Apart from the bodhicitta, apart from the thirst for great understanding, apart from the vow to love deeply, I have no more desires.* I touch the earth; I bow down; I say that I don't have any little desires. I reveal everything in me for the Buddha to see. All Buddhas in the ten directions and in the three times have offered up their merit like this. We have learned the ten vows, the aspirations of Samantabhadra. We know how Samantabhadra offered up merit, and all Buddhas have done that too. We also go on the path of these Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and so we offer up the merit too. Today we wish to offer up our merit also. I'm just taking the steps after the Buddha. *We repent of all our faults, and offer up all the merit to the ocean of immeasurable merit and to the towering mountain of highest understanding.* Our highest aim is great understanding, so we offer up all our merit to this great understanding, *Maha Prajna*. The ocean of immeasurable merit is at the same time the towering mountain of highest understanding because all of the good things we have done in the past we offer up to that highest understanding. The Buddhas and the Patriarchal Teachers are the light that shows the way. We see clearly our path. That path has been traversed by the Buddha, by the Patriarchal Teachers, and they light the way of that path for us. In this solemn moment, with all my life's force, I come back to myself to take refuge in the Three Jewels. If I am successful with my life in this lifespan, I will be successful with my next lifespan.

On Sunday we will study the *Sutra on Knowing the Better Way to Live Alone* and then the *Sutra on the Prajna Paramita*. We have this in English; you should read it. We have it in Chinese too; we've been studying it in Chinese. You should read this before I talk about it on Sunday.

[End of Dharma Talk]



# *The Sutras on Dependant Co-arising and Great Emptiness*

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Dear Sangha,

Today is the 19<sup>th</sup> March and we are in the New Hamlet in the spring retreat.

We have studied the Sutra on the Middle Way and at the same time we have looked at the Sutra on Dependent Co-arising and the Sutra on Great Emptiness. The Sutra on Dependent Co-arising is No. 296 in the *Samyukta Agama*. The word "*Samyukta*" is generally understood as "miscellaneous." This word gives us a rather negative first impression, as if items classed as "miscellaneous" were unimportant. The *Samyukta Agama* is, in fact, a collection of sutras which contain the essence of the *Buddhadharma*. If you look deeply into the sutras of the *Samyukta Agama* you will see the source of Buddhism, thus making it even greater than the other *Agamas*, like the *Madhya Agama* or the *Dirgha Agama*. These last two collections have been organised in a special manner; but in the *Samyukta Agama*, presentation is more natural. If you want to get close to the original teachings of the Buddha, examine the *Samyukta Agama*. It is a collection of short sutras containing the essence of the *Buddhadharma*. The Sutra on Dependent Co-arising, The Sutra on the Middle Way, and The Sutra on Great Emptiness are all there in the *Samyukta Agama*.

First, we shall examine the sutra called Causes and Conditions and dependent Co-arising. (Because "causes and conditions", and "interdependence" carry a similar meaning, it is sufficient to call the sutra "Dependent Co-arising.")

The word "Cause" means the seed, the principle cause or condition. "Conditions" here means other necessary conditions, but they may not be the principle conditions. Studying the word as written in Chinese reveals a number of things, one being that there is something very great within a small boundary or square. If something is to become great, it must break through those boundaries. Thus there are four walls enclosing the word "great" in the Chinese character. When you look at a mustard seed, it is small because the other conditions are not there for it to be great. But when the mustard seed is put into the earth and watered, it becomes a great plant. The conditions to bring the mustard seed to fruition are water, earth, fertiliser, and warmth. Notice that the conditions are also causes, but the primary cause, of course, is the seed itself; and the subsidiary causes are the conditions necessary to support the primary cause to develop. Thus, we can translate causes and conditions as interdependent origins or dependent co-arising. "Co" means together; simultaneously; "dependent" means relying on each other. Something cannot arise alone, nothing can stand on its own; everything is dependent upon something else.

We have the word "interdependence". There are Buddhists who live in America who say that although we celebrate Independence Day, we cannot really live without being dependent on other countries. We should talk about celebrating "Dependence or Interdependence Day." Because one country has to depend on other countries in order to exist.

"Causes and Conditions" and "Interdependent Origins" are terms; "Dependent Co-Arising" is a term. In the Sutra of Great Emptiness and the Sutra on Causes and Conditions, it is said, "This is, because that is." This is the meaning of interdependence. "This arises because that arises". The word "arises" is better than the word "born". This is the definition of the Sutra of Dependent Co-arising and it is repeated many times in the *Agamas*: "This is; therefore, that is." "This is, because that is; this is not, because that is not." "This ceases to be because that ceases to be." "This is like this, because that is like that." That is the definition of co-arising in the sutra and that is the best definition we can give. If we smile, the mirror smiles back at us, because if we are kind, our brothers and sisters will be kind.

In Buddhism there are many theories concerning causes and conditions. There are theories which talk about "four causes and conditions," or twenty, or twenty-two conditions, or twelve causes and conditions; but regardless of the number, "conditions" which are related to each other bring about a result which is existence or co-existence. If those causes and conditions were not related, they could not result in existence. When these conditions are together, connected, or inter-related, we recognise a phenomenon, we have a perception about a phenomenon. The teachings on Dependent Co-arising say that whether a Buddha is or is not present in the world, dependent co-arising remains the basis of everything. This truth, this law is always there in the field of all phenomena. This truth, or law, is always present in all dharma realms.

We are already familiar with the term *dharmadhatu*. It has lying behind it the word, "world." *lokadhatu* in Sanskrit. In Sanskrit the word "world" refers to this world. Within this world you see things that appear to be born and they die, apparently independent of each other. The grapefruit is independent of the lemon. But in the *dharmadhatu*, the lotus is not different from the meditation hall, a man is not different from his brother, all things are interconnected; in the one is the all. All dharmas, all phenomena, dwell in the *dharmadhatu*. If we can be in touch with them deeply, we can be in touch with their no-birth and no-death nature. The more superficial way of looking is we will be caught in the *lokadhatu* and we will see them being born and dying and not being related to each other. In The Sutra of Co-arising, we should understand that according to the teachings concerning Dependent Co-arising all phenomena dwell in their dharma nature. We have our dharma nature; the flower has its dharma nature. If we can be in touch with that, we are beyond the ideas of being born and dying. If we can be in touch with the dharma nature of the flower, we won't see the flower as something separate from other things. So the idea of phenomena dwelling in the *dharmadhatu* is very important. We can see the essence of the *Mahayana* already in these sutras.

When we come to line 11 we see the words, "these phenomena which are interdependent". When we observe things properly

and do not look at them in an upside-down manner, we can penetrate dependent co-arising. We will realise the teaching of interdependence. Here the word "penetrate" means to become one with the truth of interdependence. If we are in accord with that, one with that, we have exact and absolute understanding, that is called "to witness" and "to penetrate" and "to be in accord with." Then we will know clearly what is meant by the teaching on interdependence. When we have seen that, we are no longer caught in returning to the past to ask, "Was I there in the past? If so, what kind of creature was I? What kind of person was I? What was my form? What was my content? And we are not occupied with the future asking, "In the future will I exist, and if so, what kind of species will I be?" When I return to the present, I will not ask questions about whether or not I exist. Who says, "Do we exist or not? Where did I come from, where will I go?" These are questions we ask when we have no understanding of dependent co-arising. When we have been able to penetrate these teachings, we go beyond these ropes which bind us, like the view of self, the view of sentient beings, and the view of lifespan. Or the view of divination, wanting to divine the future, "How will we be in the future, what is my destiny tomorrow?" When we, in Plum Village, look in to the poem of 'Kieu', to find out our future for the year, what we are doing is asking the ancestral teachers, "How should I practise this year?" We are not trying to divine about the future.

When we have gone beyond these four ideas, we come to situation of the birthlessness of dharmas. Birthlessness means no-birth and no-death. This birthlessness of dharmas, is the dharmadhatu, it is the basis of nirvana. When we practice skilfully we can penetrate the teachings of interdependence. As far as the teachings of interdependence are concerned there is right view, the view of things as they are. This is the skilful view, the skilful understanding, the skilful practice, and the skilful penetration. The practice has to be skilful. It is not necessary to work so hard that we exhaust ourselves in order to realise the way; instead, it is because we have the skills to do that. 'Practicing skilfully' means that our practice needs our intelligence, we have to use our intelligence when we practice.

That is the Sutra on Interdependent Co-arising, and now we will go on to the Sutra on Great Emptiness. The Sutra on Great Emptiness also means interdependent co-arising. Emptiness does not mean non-existence. Emptiness means embracing everything - completely free, not being caught in an idea. *This is what I heard at a time that the Buddha was staying in the Buffalo Herdsmans' Village*, the Buddha said to the bhikkhus, "I will teach you the Dharma. This Dharma is beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle, and beautiful at the end, its meaning is good, and its taste is good, it is clear and pure. The life of a monk or nun is clear and bright". This teaching is called the Great Emptiness Sutra, the *Mahasunyata Sutra*. Bhikkhus, you should listen carefully, and accept this Sutra skilfully.

What is Emptiness? This is because this is not, this arises because that arises. Because of ignorance there is impulses; because of impulses there is consciousness, which results in this great heap of suffering. We notice that the *Six Ayatanas* have been left out. Out of this great mass of suffering arises old age, sickness, and death. Because we are born, we must to grow old and die. If anyone asks: "Who is it that has to grow old and die? This birth, old age, and death, to whom do they belong?" A lack of understanding makes people state, "It is I, myself, who has to grow old and die, this old age and death belong to me, to the self." This is the subject matter of this sutra. When we say old age and death, people ask, "Who is it that grows old? Who is it that dies?" These are not intelligent questions. Living beings are caught in the idea of self. They say we are born, we grow old, we die, and so we are afraid. But if we are able to overcome the idea of self we will not say, "I am the one who was born, I am the one who grows old, I am the one who dies; this birth and death belong to me," if we say this we then take upon ourselves a lot of suffering with no benefit.

According to the teachings of interdependent co-arising, when we understand that everything is caused and conditioned we don't need a self lying in the centre of things like this. When we ask, "Who is born, who grows old, who dies?" It is like when we look at a flower and ask, "Who is opening?" We don't need someone who is a bud, someone who opens, and the flower will still be a bud and open. You don't need an "I" which is born, which will die, and which grows old, why do you need it? Because we say, "If there is birth, there has to be an "I" that is born, if there is ageing, there has to be an "I" that grows old, and if there is death, there has to be someone who will die." In truth, when we master the teaching of dependent co-arising, birth is simply birth; old age is simply old age, death is death; there is no "I" in that. It is only when we are caught in the idea of self that we say there has to be an "I" who is born.

Look at the flower: Has it a soul within it, a self within it? Does it need to have a self in order to be born, in order to open, and in order to fade; does it need an "I" in order to exist? The idea that there has to be an "I" who is the subject to make other things possible is a misconception. The twelve causes and conditions are like that. You don't need a subject going around in the twelve links of dependent co-arising. Dependent co-arising occurs anyway. Rain happens; you don't have to ask, "Who is falling?" For there to be rain, there doesn't have to be an "I." In many languages, it is necessary to say "it" is raining. We have to have a self which is raining. But if there is rain, is there a self in the rain? We get used to this way of speaking, that there has to be a subject, a self, and only then can there be action. In language people have to put in a subject of the word rain, so we have to say, "it rains". In Vietnamese we say the sky is raining, or the weather is raining.

To practice together in order to see this we must be skilful in our practice, in our looking, in our awakening. When we say, "I know the wind is blowing," this sentence can be divided into two phrases. One is "I know," the other, "the wind is blowing." This is truly a funny statement. How can you have wind that doesn't blow? As soon as you have wind, you have blowing; without blowing there is no wind. The blowing is part of the wind. What's the point of saying, "The wind is blowing?" Why not just say, "the wind"? We also have the phrase, "I know." Do we have to have an "I". To just say "know" is enough, we don't need "I."

It's the same when we say, "A cloud is floating in the sky, a flower is opening." If a cloud is not floating in the sky, then it's the water in the river; if a flower is not open, it's not yet a flower, it's a bud. "I know" is the same. "Know" is a verb and our languages state that verbs require subjects, so you have to have the word "I". If we wish to say the truth, just to say "rain" is enough. So, with "I know" you can remove the I, "know" is enough on it's own. Why do you know, when we know we have

to know something, to know that the wind is blowing. "The wind is blowing," is the object of the knowledge. Therefore the object has a subject within it. When you know, you have to know something, so all you have to say is "the wind is blowing", you can get rid of the "know". Or if you like you can just say, "wind". Look into wind and you will see the knower there, because the wind is the object of your knowledge, and if it's wind it must be blowing. So instead of saying, "I know that the wind is blowing", you can just say "wind". In order to save space and time, and in order to be nearer to the truth, all you have to say is "wind", "cloud", "flower", "know". You don't need a subject. The flower needs no self in order to be born; old age doesn't need a self in order to be old age; we have simply become accustomed to the habit of thinking and speaking with a subject, with a self. This has been happening for so many past generations, but, unfortunately, the idea that there must be a subject is something that hides the truth from us.

We know that there are twelve causes and conditions, and they can lead to a great mass of suffering. If we are able to transform these twelve links we will have a lot of freedom and happiness. One of these twelve links is ignorance. Is it necessary to say that ignorance comes before everything else? Do we need to say, "In the beginning there was ignorance?" We know there is no beginning and no end. That is why we say, "We are your disciples since beginningless time." If we say, "In the beginning there was ignorance," we haven't understood anything. It's the same when we walk, sit, touch, eat, there is ignorance in it. All we need is mindfulness, and we will see ignorance in our daily life. Ignorance is a lack of clarity, a lack of looking deeply.

Ignorance brings in its train impulsive action. Impulse means energy, *samskara*. When we misunderstand another sister, that is ignorance which results in irritation and aversion to that sister. Energy is called here *Samskara*, it is an energy which pushes us to do or say something, that is our action. This action lies in our unconscious mind. Can we see that we all have ignorance and impulses in our unconscious mind? Let us consider a glass of water as an example of our consciousness. One drop of black ink in that glass of water, and the water becomes black. That glass of water is our consciousness, and these drops of ink, ignorance, cloud our consciousness. All our jealousy, all our despair, come from this ignorance. These negative emotions are *samskara*; they are impulses that make us suffer and make others suffer. Therefore ignorance leads to impulses (*samskara*); and *samskara* also leads to ignorance; ignorance and *samskara* give rise to each other. If we sit quietly and look at ourselves we will see ignorance and *samskara* holding hands in us. When we see and acknowledge this, and smile, we will already feel better, we feel that we can intervene at this point, and that is what is meant by practicing. So with a drop of black ink in a glass of water, clarity becomes obscured. When our wisdom is obscured, it can no longer be called wisdom; instead, we must call it consciousness. Consciousness is therefore wisdom which contains a drop of black ink.

*Prajna* is the glass of clear water without the drop of ink in it, once we have the drop of ink in it, then *prajna* becomes *vijnana*, it becomes consciousness. Impulses give rise to consciousness, and consciousness give rise to impulses. We must see clearly that our conscious mind is holding hands with our *samskaras*. We don't know what they are planning together, but we should find out. Only mindfulness will help us to see what these two are plotting together.

Consciousness arises in two ways: as form (or body), and as mind. In Sanskrit it is *namarupa*. Our aggregates (*skandhas*), our body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness, all belong to this field of psyche-soma and they are all a manifestation of consciousness. Consciousness is present in all *skandhas*. Because these *skandhas* contain wrong consciousness, wrong *samskaras*; they are therefore the objects of grasping, and we get caught by them. So they are called the five elements of grasping. In our own person our *skandhas* already contain grasping, because they are the manifestations of consciousness coloured by ignorance. Psyche and soma are Greek terms. Psyche refers to our feelings, our perceptions, and our consciousness; and soma is our body. When we look into psyche and soma, we see consciousness, ignorance, and impulses. In our body, there is ignorance. If this ignorance did not exist in our body, it would not be as it is. It is through ignorance that we eat junk foods, and we live in a certain way; that is why our body is what it is.

So if you look into our feelings you will see the presence of consciousness, of impulses, and of ignorance. And here consciousness means wrong consciousness. So our five aggregates are related to consciousness, the six objects of our senses, and the six organs of sense. Form and psyche-soma gives rise to the six organs of sense, they manifest as our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind, each in turn giving us form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and object of mind. When we have these twelve things we have contact, and when we have contact between the six organs and the six objects of sense, we have feeling-pleasant and unpleasant. Because these six organs and objects of sense contain ignorance and impulses, when they come together, because of contact, there is still ignorance, impulses, and attachment. Therefore contact gives rise to feelings, and these feelings are conditioned by ignorance. Sometimes, although we think they are pleasant feelings, they are not, because there is attachment, there is irritation because there is ignorance in our feelings. There are things which are not beautiful, but we say they are. Things which are not pure, we say are pure. Those things which are not self, we say are self; things which are not enemy, we say are enemy. So there is ignorance, and it is seen in the five *skandhas*, the Six *Ayatanas*, contact, and feelings. When feelings contain ignorance, then there is grasping.

Grasping and craving don't manifest only after ignorance. They are present in ignorance from the start. In ignorance there is attachment, jealousy, anger and hatred. This craving, this attachment gives rise to grasping, and grasping makes the roots of craving grow deeper. Once the roots have gone deeper, there is the arising of the life of suffering, attachment, and bondage. The cycle of suffering and bondage then manifests in terms of birth, old age, and death. You can portray the Six *Ayatanas*, contact, and feeling all together. Sometimes the Buddha talked like that, he said there were only seven causes and conditions, and other times he said there were eight, nine, ten, or twelve. So any number of causes and conditions are correct, it doesn't mean that twelve causes and conditions are more correct than ten causes and conditions. So we can talk about the psyche-soma, but we can also talk about the five *skandhas*. So we have twelve links; ignorance, impulses, consciousness etc, and they're all linked to one another, they all influence each other. For example ignorance is not only the cause of impulses, but impulses are also the cause of ignorance, and ignorance is also the cause of consciousness and psyche-soma. In each one of these eleven there is ignorance, in each of the other eleven links there is *samskara*, and in each the other eleven links there is consciousness. So do not think that the twelve links are in a straight line, one leading on to the next one. If you take a little of your flesh or

your emotion in one moment of your daily life, you will see that all of the twelve links are in that small part you have taken. These twelve causes and conditions lean on each other, are committed to each other and bring about the great mass of suffering. Each one of the twelve links is in relation with the other eleven.

If you don't look practice, if you don't look deeply, you allow this cycle to continue. If you practice, if you light up the lamp of mindfulness, you will say, "that is how it is working. You will say, "let it not work like that anymore, we have suffered enough already." When we bring mindfulness into the picture, this ignorance becomes less dark, and clarity arises. Because we look deeply into the twelve causes and conditions, the darkness of ignorance is released and the light begins to appear. From where does this light come? It comes from the consciousness. Within consciousness is ignorance, but there is also a seed of awakening, and mindfulness. If we bring the seed out of consciousness and light it like a lamp, that light will make the darkness disappear. Very often our suffering, our despair, helps us to awaken. Thus, clarity can come from ignorance. When the lamp is alight the ignorance of our attachment, our despair, will weaken and change. When we have clarity we don't want to pay someone back for what they have done, to make somebody suffer for what they have done to us. We want to do something greater, we want to help our sister who has made us suffer, because we know then that if our sister is happy, we shall be happy. So we have a good aspiration as the cause of our clarity. This clarity gives rise to the *bodhicitta*, or the great aspiration. If you have a great aspiration, have the energy of *bodhicitta* within you, that is because you have seen suffering, you have awakened to the presence of suffering, and you want to put an end to it. That is why you give rise to this great aspiration, this *bodhicitta*, which comes from clarity.

Therefore ignorance brings about *samskaras* which have blindness in them, actions and emotions which contain fear, attachment, hatred, and jealousy. When you have clarity this brings about an energy. That is not blind energy; it is the energy which will bring us to do things which are useful. We can call this energy the energy of *bodhicitta*, or the great aspiration. If ignorance gives rise to *samskara*, clarity gives rise to great aspiration. This great aspiration does not darken the mind; rather it gives rise to wisdom. In consciousness there is ignorance, but in wisdom there is not. Wisdom therefore makes our aspirations stronger and more solid. When the mind is no longer *vijnana* (consciousness), but is *prajna* (wisdom), we want to be there to save beings, we have the great aspiration. The great aspiration gives us the insight that we have to be there for the beings who are suffering in the three realms. So we have something which is equivalent to psyche-soma in order to be present but we don't call it psyche-soma, we call it *nirmanakaya* (transformation body). We are present as all other living beings, but living beings contain so much hatred, so much darkness. Our presence is to bring freshness and happiness like the flower, to be present like flowers. It is called the *nirmanakaya*, and that is the form in which *bodhisattvas* are present. There are the six senses, but this wisdom lays at the basis, while in the first cycle an ordinary person has the six senses, but the six senses are the cause of bondage for that person. As for the *bodhisattva* the six senses are there, but they are the transformation body of the *bodhisattva*; the six senses do not have ignorance in them, they have the great vow in them. The transformation body of the *bodhisattva* is also in contact with the objects of the senses, and there is contact between the sense organs and the object. So here we call the Six *Ayatanas* the subject and object of sense. And there is the contact between subject and object of sense as far as the *bodhisattva* is concerned, because the *bodhisattva* is there in the world in order to be in touch. In that contact between the sense organs and the six objects of sense, there is mindfulness, so there isn't ignorance. When the *bodhisattva's* six organs of sense are in touch with the six objects of sense, there is mindfulness. Mindfulness means there is clarity, there is great aspiration, and wisdom. This contact leads to feeling which also contains mindfulness. (If you have an interest in very concise terminology, please read *The Heart of the Buddha*.)

Of course, where there is mindfulness, there will be pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings. But these feelings do not contain ignorance like the feelings of ordinary beings, instead these feelings contain great aspiration and wisdom. So when there is a painful feeling the *bodhisattva* knows that it is a painful feeling, and that it is really a painful feeling. And when there is a pleasant feeling the *bodhisattva* knows that it is a pleasant feeling, and that it is really a pleasant feeling. So there is no wrong perception within feelings; they are recognised for what they are. A *bodhisattva* can share the suffering of living beings. When they see someone in great pain, they feel compassion, they suffer, and the *bodhisattva* is nourished by that kind of suffering; it helps to increase their wisdom. Therefore feeling here is feeling with mindfulness. The feelings borne by the *bodhisattva* do not lead to craving. They lead to compassion, and loving kindness. Seeing living things suffer, the *bodhisattva* does not give rise to anger; instead the suffering gives rise to love and the mind of compassion. Living beings suffer and they spread their suffering around them, because they suffer, they crave, and are attached. When the *bodhisattva* feels this suffering he is still free and has compassion and loving-kindness.

Loving kindness and compassion contain clarity. They do not lead to attachment, but to freedom. Because the *bodhisattva* has compassion and love, he is always able to maintain his freedom, which goes along with clarity and great aspiration. When we lose our clarity and our great aspiration, we lose our freedom at the same time. Therefore, in freedom there is loving-kindness, compassion, and mindfulness. In the feelings of the *bodhisattva* there is also wisdom and freedom. That is why the freedom of the *bodhisattva* can be maintained fully. If clarity and great aspiration are lost, freedom is lost at the same time.

The substance of the *bodhisattva* is freedom, but if the *bodhisattva* goes into life, it's not because of attachment or bondage. Rather, it is because of the great aspiration. Because of compassion and loving-kindness, the *bodhisattva* goes into the world of birth and death, the world of indifference. Not abandoning the beings who are drowning and drifting in the three worlds. While living beings are drowning and drifting, the *bodhisattva* is going in freedom in the *dharmadhatu*. So being or becoming is the *lokadhatu*, and the equivalent is the *dharmadhatu*. All living beings, including *bodhisattvas*, are in the world, but their way of living is what makes it the *lokadhatu* or the *dharmadhatu*, the pure land or the *saha*-world. So when the *bodhisattva* has established his freedom, the *bodhisattva* goes into the world. We see the *bodhisattva* is with us in the world of birth and death, but the *bodhisattva* has gone beyond that and is dwelling in the world of no birth and no-death in a very natural and peaceful way. The world of no birth and no-death is caused or conditioned by clarity. To see things being born and dying, that is ignorance, but when we see things without birth and death, that is clarity.

Here we have the twelve causes and conditions in two aspects: the first is life and death; the second is liberation and *nirvana*. The cycle of birth and death is that in which ordinary living beings drown and sink because of their ignorance. The other cycle is that in which the *bodhisattvas* realise awakening. We know through these twelve links, we do not need a subject called "I", because if we can penetrate the world of the *dharmadhatu* we do not need a subject, we do not need a self. Therefore the question that is given in this sutra is "Who is it who grows old, who is it who owns old-age?" The answer is, if you still require a subject to go through birth, old age, and death - if you retain the ideas that this is my life span, my self - then you are not yet a real practitioner.

Who is born, grows old, and dies? Life span is this body, or life span is not this body? These questions give rise to so many other questions, but these are philosophical questions. These questions have one meaning although they arise in many different forms. It's just an idea, but when spoken it has many different forms. People who are caught in questions like this, and are occupied by them, are not worthy to be someone practising. If you hear someone say that life-span is one with our body, then that person is not worthy to be called a practitioner. If you say that your life-span is not your body, it's not right either, because all these things are caught in ideas. When a *bodhisattva* is able to penetrate the causes and conditions of the teachings of interdependent arising then, in the twelfth line it says, "our mind will not fall into either of these two extremes". We are not caught in one of these two ideas, that our body is our life-span or our life-span is not our body. We can go directly on the middle way, and we know that the middle way is the way which goes beyond the pairs of opposites. These pairs of opposites are; is/is not, permanence/annihilation, same/different, one/many.

Here we must remember that if you are still occupied with questions like the ones we have examined, "Was I there in the past, what animal, what thing was I in the past, and how was I in the past?" Or in the future, "Will I be there or not, and if I am there what will I be, and what will my form be?" Or in the present, "Am I really here, am I really existing, what am I, and where am I going, where have I come from?" Then you have not yet penetrated the teachings of interdependent arising. You are still caught in the four signs of self, living being, life span, and divination. The idea that life span is this body or life span is not this body are two ideas that belong to extreme views. When you fall into such extreme views, you have not been able to penetrate interdependent arising. When we are able to penetrate interdependent arising, we are walking on the Middle Way, and we are not caught in these two pairs of opposites; birth and death, is and is not, permanent and annihilation, the same and different. If our mind is not caught in these two extremes, we go directly onto the Middle Way. When the noble ones come into this life they are able to present reality as it is, not upside down, but in accord with the truth. Here we have reference to right view as we do in The Sutra on the Middle Way.

The Sutra On Great Emptiness also talks about the dharma of no birth, when ignorance has been transformed. When attachment is no longer there, and when the light of wisdom has arisen, we no longer see the subject of birth and death. You do not see birth, old age, and death as belonging to someone. You simply see the ending of birth and death, and you know that the basis of suffering has ended, just like a palm tree from which the top has been cut, it will no longer grow. When the practitioner sees the truth of this, he arrives at the insight of no-birth and no-death. This is 9<sup>th</sup> line, "*If this ignorance is ended and we can leave behind attachment, then clarity is borne*". The question, "Who is the one who dies and grows old?" and, "who is the one who owns old age and death?" is no longer a question. Because once old age and death have come to an end, we know that we have uprooted the root of ignorance and attachment. We know we have cut it off at the root, like when we cut the top of the palm tree. In the future we will arrive at the fruit of no-birth, no-death, or nirvana. If ignorance is taken out of attachment, then clarity is born, and these questions will no longer be questions because we have gone beyond this point. Like the palm tree whose top has been removed, it can no longer live. We will be liberated and will realise the teaching of birthlessness and deathlessness. Here, conditioned dependent co-arising is called by a very good name: it is called *mahasunyata*-the great emptiness. Emptiness here means the non-existence of a subject called self as a necessary condition as part of the cycle of causes and conditions.

In conclusion, we may have learnt by heart, we may be able to describe what is meant by dependent co-arising, we may be able to say what is meant by ignorance; we may talk very fluently about the twelve links; but if we are not able to overcome the idea of self, if we are not able to overcome the idea of living being, if we have not been able to overcome the idea of life span, if we continue to be occupied with questions such as, "Who am I?", "Where do I come from?", "Where will I go to?", "What was I like in the past?", "What will I be like in the future?", it means we have not understood the teachings of interdependence, however well we might describe and teach them. Therefore interdependence is given to us as a tool for looking deeply, and we look deeply in our daily lives, living them deeply. So when we cook, wash clothes, or practice walking meditation, we live in such a way that we look deeply into the interdependent nature of all phenomena. We must penetrate in order to become one with the functioning of interdependence. We have to penetrate the flower and see the functioning of the flower, we have to go into the cloud and see the functioning of interdependence in the cloud, and we can realise the great emptiness. Then we can go beyond the idea of self, the sign of self, and at the same time we can go beyond the idea of living being, of life span. We go beyond these ideas and we see we have become one with the teachings of interdependence. At that point we come to understand birthlessness, we can live in the *dharmadhatu* without being carried away by the *lokadhatu*. That is the conclusion. We know that in the sutras of original Buddhism, like the Sutra on the Middle Way, the Sutra on Interdependence, the Sutra on Great Emptiness, we have seen that these sutras contain the essence of the *Mahayana*. We see clearly that the *Mahayana* is the work of the ancestral teachers, to help us see clearly the deeper levels of the original teachings of the Buddha. Which because of a superficial study and practice, we have not been able to discover. The opportunity to study the original teachings of the Buddha through the eyes of the *Mahayana*, is very wonderful.

Next time we will study the sutra on Measuring and Reflecting.

## The vows of the four great Bodhisattvas

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Dear Sangha, today is the 15th January and we are in the New Hamlet. Today we will be studying the vows of the four great Bodhisattvas contained in the chanting of Monday evening.

Before we begin, I would like to make a few announcements. On the 4th of February we will be having an ordination ceremony for a number of new novice monks and nuns. That day will be a very nice day. In the early morning we will have the ordination ceremony.... I am now pregnant with these new babies and there is a lot of agitation in my womb because we are not yet sure how many babies I will give birth to. It seems that there are three, there may be four... it is uncertain right now.

On the same day, after lunch we will have the ceremony of Lamp Transmission (ordaining a new Dharma Teacher). There is only one nun (the Abbess) from the New Hamlet receiving the Lamp on that day so she will be able to give a long talk. I think that she will be giving a wonderful talk. She may tell us what led her to become a nun, what difficulties has she faced and how she has overcome them. She has been a nun for 24 or 25 years, since she was very young, and she has changed temples and practice centers a lot. Finally she has come to dwell with us here in our practice center, and so I am sure that she will have a lot to share with you.

Those that will be ordained as novices on that day will be able to wear their Sanghati robes for the first time in order to support their elder sister who will be sharing her insight with us that afternoon.

I also want to announce that the following people are apprentice Dharma Teachers (list)... they will receive the Lamp of Transmission this year or next year. I hope that they don't have to wait until the Year 2000! When I give birth to a child, I want them to grow up. If they don't grow up it is very sad for me. When I announce that you are going to be considered as an apprentice Dharma Teacher then it is a call for you to grow up, to be a grown up person. There are those among the list of names that are already ripe for the transmission but they can wait to receive the Lamp at the same time as the other brothers and sisters.

There are also those that may not be able to succeed in receiving the Lamp even after two years. It all depends on his or her practice and the support of the Sangha, because I am very aware of the ways in which I try my best to support my students in order for them to grow up. I am very generous with them. I don't ever want to lose the occasion to support my students... to do my utmost for them, but if they themselves don't try their very best it is difficult for me to help them.

We also need to take refuge in the Sangha eye.... more often than not, we are so sure that we are right. We think that we are very mindful, that we have deep insight but the Sangha eyes can always shine the light on some dark part of ourselves that we are not yet aware of. The shining of the Sangha eye is a practice to help you to improve yourself. It is a practice of transformation.

If you are so sure of yourself and your rightness then there is no need for you to come and practice here... you don't need to practice together with the Sangha. It is true that the Sangha eyes may only give a partial view as well, but when they shine on you must do your best in order to transform the negative seeds that have been pointed out to you.

In 1999 I will propose another list of apprentice Dharma Teachers but for now, I give you this list and I hope with all my heart that the candidates will succeed in becoming Dharma teachers this year or at the latest next year. It is possible however, that one of them may fail to receive the Lamp. I would like to emphasize stability. If you don't have stability, then your relationship with your brothers and sisters in the Dharma will not be harmonious and you cannot be happy. Therefore, the second element that is necessary for a Dharma Teacher is the capacity to be harmonious, with yourself first of all. When you have peace and harmony within yourself then you will see things in a new light with inclusiveness and tolerance. And in this way you become harmonious in your relationships with others. If you yourself are not harmonious, how is it possible for you to teach others to be peaceful and harmonious?

Not only must you be harmonious with those who are easy, but also with those who are most difficult. Try your very best to deeply understand and support him or her without suppressing yourself. It is the love and care that you show to others that proves that you are able to be a Dharma Teacher. We will know that we have the capacity to be a good Dharma Teacher when those that have come to Plum Village for a month, a week, a day or even a few hours all receive your love, your care and your deep listening. You are able to be a Dharma Teacher because you really care.

Now I would like explain the way in which we practice to look deeply into, and shine our awareness on one member of the Sangha. Sometimes in these meetings which can continue for two or three days, we may feel that all is lost. We must consider these Shining Light meetings to be a practice as it is part of our training to be able to look more deeply into a sister or brother, or a person who is a candidate for joining your Sangha as a new monk or nun.

Your own insight may be superficial, but being together with the sangha, after each person shares his or her wisdom, the collective insight becomes very great indeed. When we sit together as a large Sangha, the wisdom and insight of each person complements the other. If your own deep looking is still largely superficial, it will be deepened by the insight of another member.

Occasionally as a result of the length of these meetings that can last for three hours, we may feel that we are losing a lot of time that could be better spent elsewhere. This is not true. These meetings are a practice of collective insight. When we look together and share our insight, it is not a vote by majority but by consensus. This means we all have to agree that whatever insight is shared with the person that we are shining light on is valid, even if we may see it from a different point of view.

To begin such a meeting, we will all come to sit together and the leader of the collective deep looking session will say, "I would like to invite you to look deeply into the attitude and behavior of X who has submitted an application to become a member of our Sangha, to become a novice monk or a novice nun. I request you to use all of your compassion and your insight in shining the light of awareness on X. Please be frank and open in sharing whether you feel that X's practice will improve day by day and would be a good monk/nun."

In Plum Village, we can also practice Buddhist meditation with a notebook and a pencil. We don't always need to close our eyes! Each of us will take a piece of paper and a pen and look deeply in order to see all of the good qualities and also the shortcomings of the person. We must always consider the good and lovely qualities in a person before we begin to think about their shortcomings... sometimes we can feel so shocked by some of the person's shortcomings that it may be difficult for us to see the beauty in them. We can also use this same spirit in our daily lives, at home or in the office... rather than always thinking of peoples' shortcomings we may like to try to think of their good qualities first.

The leader of the meeting will then allow about ten or twelve minutes for the community to write down their insight... first the good qualities, secondly the shortcomings and thirdly, advice that you think would clear the way for them, help them. For example we may share, "I feel that you have these good qualities... and these shortcomings.... and so in light of this I would like to propose that ..... We do not condemn, we may only propose. Every member of the Sangha will share their insight and their practice proposals like that. While the other members of the Sangha are sharing their insight, we will listen deeply and compare our own insight about the candidate. It may be that after hearing a few of the other members' sharings we feel that we must correct our insight, modify our points. We now have a more complete view of the person. In this way, we have the opportunity to correct and increase the depth of our insight. These are my thoughts. I hope that everyone will try to practice in this way.

So the meetings themselves will be divided into three parts. Firstly, the leader of the Sangha will announce and distribute a sheet of paper to each person and we each write down our insight. Secondly, everyone reads their points and corrects their insight. Thirdly, we unify our insight and come to an agreement.

For instance, one member of the Sangha says, "That person has this weakness..." In that case, you may not believe that the person has such a weakness and so you will raise your hand and share the reasons for your disagreement. You must make your point of view clear in order for people to understand your observation. If we feel that someone's points are not really correct, we can raise our hand and ask them to elaborate, make it clearer in order for us to understand better. It may be that they are correct, but unable to articulate it clearly.

After all of the community has clarified and explained their points, we ask the secretary of the meeting to write down the agreed points and with all of the Sangha's love and care will prepare a letter to the candidate to share the fruit of the meeting, of our collective insight. We do it with love and care because we do not want to become a judge. We really want them to become a good instrument of the Dharma, to become a happy person himself or herself, and then going and sharing the Dharma with others in order to bring happiness to them.

I am proposing these three steps because I know that these meetings can sometimes be very long. I think that if we follow this format then the meetings will be shorter. When we are practicing the second and third steps we may like to record the proceedings on a tape in order to be able to transmit the collective insight of the Sangha more accurately. This tape can be erased after we have formulated our report to the candidate. You won't need to keep this tape because this is the deepest insight of the Sangha... therefore nobody can complain. The whole Sangha has looked deeply and corrected their insight in order to complete each other.

(Bell)

Here is the list of the apprentice Dharma Teachers next year... (list)

These people, eleven in all will be apprentices Dharma teachers and they must try to practice properly. You must cooperate with the Dharma Teachers in making decisions and taking responsibility... you are also in charge. We also need the help and insight of the Sangha in order to be a better Dharma Teacher. If our stability becomes greater, then so will our communication with others. My wish, the wish of the Sangha is that you become a source of peace and happiness for all of those around you. When you are able to become a source of love, peace and understanding for others, then I will consider you as a success. However, at the end of the year, maybe four or five will receive the lamp of transmission. Next year, I will propose another list of apprentice Dharma Teachers.

With regard to the lay people I would like to propose (list). These people have stayed in the Village for a long time already. They know a lot about the teaching. We need them to be more solid in the practice. I have heard that in the Lower Hamlet practitioners approach Karl and Helga more than (name) even though she is already a Dharma Teacher... but she is lazy, she doesn't really come and try to listen to the difficulties of the practitioners. My wish is that they become more available in order to share the work with Karl and Helga in order to benefit Thay and the Sangha. Whatever you don't understand you can ask Thay.

Today we are studying the four great Bodhisattva vows in the chanting of Monday evening. We shine our awareness on the four great Bodhisattvas, but we also must bear in mind that every Bodhisattva is an awakened living being. You are also an awakened living being not less than they are. However you must train yourself in order to become more like them. When we invoke these qualities of the Bodhisattvas, we must also try to evoke the same quality within us. The method that we use in order to chant this section is that one person will read the invocation of one Bodhisattva on behalf of the whole Sangha, four Bodhisattvas in all. The quality of that reading should be very deep. The persons chosen to read on behalf of the Sangha must be solid, deep and be able to pronounce clearly every word and phrase. When these people read, we will all be able to feel the relaxed attitude and the concentration of this person. If we choose somebody to read who makes many mistakes or does it in a casual, superficial way there will be no benefit. Usually when you invite someone to read on behalf of the Sangha, you need to invite him or her to practice beforehand and if you see that they are able to read in a relaxed and concentrated way then you may invite them to read for the community.

But, if you just wait until the last moment and just pick up one person to read, there will be no benefit. For example, the gatha for evening sitting meditation begins "Stably seated at the foot of the Bodhi tree"... this is an invitation for the whole community to begin sitting meditation. You must choose one brother or sister who will try their very best and who has a good voice quality and stability. When you invite such a person, you will feel quite satisfied. If someone just raises his or her voice and everyone begins to giggle because it is so funny the way that he chants, then the whole period of sitting meditation will be destroyed. The freedom and stability of such a person is therefore very important.

Back to the Four Bodhisattvas. At the beginning you may believe that the four Bodhisattvas are outside of us. If you practice steadily, you will see that you are also that Bodhisattva because you also have all of those qualities. Some historians may not believe that there was ever a 'real' Avalokitesvara or Manjushri; they are not historical personalities. We cannot say that they were born in such and such a year and died in such and such a year... and so you may be embarrassed. If you come from the Mahayana tradition, you are so sure that these beings exist. But you must know that the name, Avalokitesvara (Regarded of the Cries of the Earth) is a symbol of deep listening and compassion. Compassion and deep listening truly exist everywhere, but where is everywhere? You must see that deep listening and compassion exist in at least one person. When you see such a person you know that that person is not the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara although they are manifesting the qualities of that Bodhisattva, and so you will feel that you will be able to do it also. I also have compassion and deep listening. Maybe my compassion and deep listening are not as strong as the other person's is, but I will train myself to increase this ability to love. Therefore, it is not important whether Avalokitesvara is an historical personage... if the qualities of love, compassion and deep listening exist so then must Avalokitesvara. We can also see that Avalokitesvara is a representation of some of the qualities of the Buddha also. Gautama Buddha is an historical person and he had these qualities... and Gautama Buddha said that everyone had these qualities like him. The qualities of the Buddha, love, understanding, compassion and deep listening are also in you.

The Bodhisattva Manjushri (Great Understanding) is another manifestation of the qualities of the Buddha. When you pay your respects to the qualities of wisdom and great understanding in the Buddha, you are paying respect to Manjushri also and vice versa. At the same time, you are also paying homage to those qualities in yourself. So although there are many disagreements between the Theravada and Mahayana traditions over whether these Bodhisattvas exist or not, we know that this is not so important. The important thing is that the qualities of great understanding and wisdom exist around us and within us. To a practitioner, it is not even important whether the Buddha was a historical person or not. You don't care. Some western people may debate some saying that Shakyamuni (Gautama) Buddha was historical or legendary, but you won't care. More importantly, he embodies compassion, great understanding, wisdom and love so he must be a very great personality. Without such a great personality how could he have built understanding wherever he goes?

The Bodhisattva Samantabhadra is the Bodhisattva of great action. Universal goodness, and goodness of action. Samantabhadra works hard and has the will to help.

Ksitigarbha (Earth Store Bodhisattva) who vowed to save all living beings in hell embodies truly great qualities of the Buddha. Some Christians are 'allergic' to the word, 'vow', but here we have no complex concerning that word... it is a very beautiful word. Ksitigarbha vowed that he would never abandon you. If you are caught in the condition of hell, even, he has vowed not to abandon you. Wherever there are people suffering the most, there also is Ksitigarbha... he is in jail; she is being tortured so I will

not abandon them. In this very world there are hells where people undergo the utmost suffering. We decide never to abandon them, rather we try our best to approach and to support them. Ksitigarbha is these qualities of not abandoning. He never abandons anyone even if that person is horribly difficult.

The key point is for us to be in touch with these four Bodhisattvas within ourselves by using the energy of mindfulness.

By reflecting on the qualities of these four Bodhisattvas we will see that mindfulness has four aspects.

The first aspect is compassion and loving-kindness. If Shakyamuni Buddha has no love then he is no longer a Buddha. In order to be a Buddha, a person must have a lot of love. S/he can love the lovable but also the unlovable.

The second aspect of mindfulness is great understanding. Without great understanding (maha Prajna) Gautama Buddha is no longer our Teacher. A Buddha must have great understanding and wisdom.

The third and fourth aspects are action and vows. When you are able to see clearly, you can only love. You cannot abandon the person that you love. They may be horrible, difficult people but you cannot abandon them because they are in hell and they need us.

When you love, you have to act. If you say that you have a lot of love but you don't do anything then that is not love that is merely lip service. The great vow of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva is, "until the hells are empty I will not become a Buddha. I will remain until every sentient being is liberated.

To vow to go to the darkest places to help beings is perhaps the greatest of vows because sometimes these places are horrible. You will not abandon those who suffer. The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara illustrates the first aspect, love. Manjushri Bodhisattva represents great understanding. Samantabhadra is Great Action and Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva the Great Vow. In Mahayana temples usually the ears represent Avalokitesvara, Manjushri by the eyes and Samantabhadra by the hand.

For these reasons, we are able to say that these Bodhisattvas existed in the past, exist now and will exist also in the future. They don't need to be historical fact. Rather they are a reality, that ability to love, to understand, and act, save people and vow not to abandon those who suffer. These qualities exist in us we cannot deny it. They are truly in you, in those around you... in your teacher in the teacher of your teacher... so you may say that, "I don't care whether Avalokitesvara is a historical person... the truth is that the qualities of love, understanding and deep listening are within me and also you and that is more than enough."

(Bell)

One of the greatest problems that we face is the problem of faith. There are those who say that they worship God. If one day you discover that the concept that you have of God doesn't exist it may be very difficult for you because you have devoted 10 or 20 years of your life to it. In the history of human thought there have been those who state that, "If you worship God and He exists then you will go to Paradise. If you worship Him and it turns out later that He doesn't exist then you will not have lost anything. If God really exists and you don't worship Him then you can't go to paradise."

Actually, we know that the point is not whether it is true or untrue. As we said before, you may answer that (Avalokitesvara, Manjushri, Samantabhadra, Ksitigarbha, God or so on...) exist because I see their qualities in many people and in myself. We must be intelligent. If someone asks you whether you believe that God exists, you must ask with what criteria do they define God.

If you say that God is a symbol of love, that is okay and there is no doubt; you will not lose anything if you practice the presence of God because it is the presence of love and you can express love everywhere. If God is great understanding, you can practice in such a way that great understanding exists everywhere, so God exists. It is the same for Ksitigarbha. If you have Bodhicitta, the mind of love, you are able to enter and remain in those hells and illumine them

with a lot of light. Just the fact that you are there relieves a lot of suffering. Nowadays, in Vietnam, there are a lot of Ksitigarbha's there, they remain in the prison but they have a lot of inner freedom and joy and they can be very light and relieve a lot of suffering. If you are able to perceive the suffering around you, yet you don't feel anything and don't act then the Ksitigarbha in you is still small. Our practice is to make the Ksitigarbha, the Avalokitesvara in you grow. Even though we may not be called by the name Buddhist, we are still able to manifest these qualities of the Bodhisattvas within us... for example people like, Physicians without Borders or Amnesty International... these people may not have even heard about the Buddha or the Bodhisattvas yet they are able to actualize the teachings of love and compassion through their actions

The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. 'I vow to learn to listen deeply to others so I can help relieve the suffering of others.' Sometimes you know that he or she suffers, but you don't care, you have no chance, you do not want to share, to listen deeply. 'I vow to learn your ways to listen deeply, you are the heart that can know how to listen and to understand deeply. You are the one who can listen deeply and understand deeply. I will vow to sit quietly to listen to you.' The person who suffers a lot has the impression that nobody can understand him or her but if she or he can find one person who can sit quietly beside them and listen one hour to them, that is a great chance. So we have to train ourselves to be a deep listener and someone who understands deeply. So when you understand deeply you are a Manjushri. When you listen deeply, you are Avalokitesvara. We must learn to see in light of interconnectedness, interconnection. If you look deeper, you see that Avalokitesvara is Manjushri and so forth. There is no separation. Although in Buddhism we personify different aspects, we must see their interbeing nature .

Samantabhadra is someone who acts. If you don't understand deeply, if you don't love deeply, how can you act? When you act without understanding, without love, you can create more suffering than help. When you listen to somebody, your whole being must be 100 percent present. And being totally present like that, you will be concentrated. Having concentration means you get rid of the past, get rid of the future and focus 100 percent on one point, that is the heart of the suffering of others. We pull ourselves together, we try to be there 100 percent in order to listen others, listen with all your attentiveness, your great attention. I am sure that each of us has that ability but sometimes we don't use it! Our compassion exists but it is not big enough to help us to be there and to listen to him too long or to her too long. So we will not be lost in the past, we will not lose ourselves in the future, but we look deeply. Usually we listen to our beloved one with half an ear only. We have to learn to listen to him or to her with 100 percent of ourselves. 'I vow to learn to listen without prejudice.' When you have an idea and someone presents another idea, you don't want to hear it. Whatever the other person says becomes distorted to favor your point of view. When we listen to somebody, we usually have an idea, a prejudice about that person, and then when people say something, we color the statements of the other people with our own prejudices. The vow of Avalokitesvara is you listen without any prejudice, any preconceived idea, you just empty yourself and be in the heart of others, in the difficulty of others, be in the fear of others in order to understand her difficulty. And the other part is I want to learn to listen without judging or reacting.

We have a habit energy to be a judge. Sometimes a judge for ourselves, sometimes a judge for others. When we hear something, we immediately form a judgement as to whether this is bad or good. Don't be a judge. Don't be a wall. You have to be space. Space can absorb everything, but if you are a judge you will have a wall and whatever people say will rebound back to them and they won't feel relieved at all but rather suffocated.

There is a Vietnamese musician who said that sometimes you must be space so that love can enter. If you are a wall, how can the All enter? You have to empty yourself of your preconceived ideas. You must become space. There is a Zen story concerning a philosopher who comes to visit a Zen master, and whilst the Zen master is preparing tea, the philosopher keeps talking endlessly about how much he knows. And so the Zen master prepares the tea and he pours the water into teapot until the teapot is overflowing. The water flows over the pot, the cup, and the table. The Philosopher shouts, "Stop! Stop! Don't you see that the



flood is everywhere?" And the Zen master smiles to that, "Your head is also a flood with all those thoughts exactly like the flood on my table. You want to come and learn with me, but you are so full of all your knowledge. Your knowledge floods everywhere, so how can you receive anything from me?"

And so the Vietnamese musician reminds us to be space so that love can enter, understanding can enter. We must learn not to be a judge. We already judge others a lot and others have also judged us. We suffer a lot. Now we learn not to be a judge, not to judge people. The aim of listening deeply is understanding. When you hear something correct, you understand; and when you hear something that shocks your ear, don't reject it. Try to look deeper. Maybe you can learn something about your own mind as well as the mind of others. 'I vow to listen deeply in order to understand what people are saying. And also that left unsaid.' Sometimes there are things that are too difficult for people to express. Some people come to our practice, and at the beginning they pretend they have nothing, they are quite fine; but if they stay with you about five days, seven days, they start to share with you some things, but what they say is not yet the deeper reality, only the superficial portion because they are afraid that they will be judged by you. So you have to listen deeply, even if they repeat themselves. Try to understand what is left unsaid and if you are skillful, then you see the very critical point and you will ask the right question for that person to release.

There's a couple who came and they told only the small difficulties around but not the real difficulties. Usually people are afraid to lose their prestige, they don't dare to tell the real problem but they only tell the secondary problem. Only when they arrive, when they stay, and they get attention and care from somebody several times, maybe a dharma teacher they dare to tell.

Sometimes a visitor can stay only a few days, and if she cannot see a dharma teacher, and if she is not lucky to see somebody who is competent, you can be that Bodhisattva of deep listening too, you listen with one hundred percent of your being in order to understand what has been said and what has been left unsaid. When you listen like that, then suddenly you will understand the point that that person didn't say and if you know how to ask the right question then she will be able to release their inner pain.

One day, myself and a teenager were pulling some weeds, then the teenager spoke to me saying, "There is something that I see that is very beautiful but my mother says is not beautiful. How can you explain that?" And I looked deeply into his situation and I said, "Would I be correct in thinking that there is a young Swiss girl that you think is beautiful but your mother doesn't?" And he was very shocked, "How did you know that?" He only told me that there is something beautiful that his mother says is not beautiful, and he didn't dare to tell the truth. When I looked deeply, I knew it must mean he fell in love with some beautiful girl and his mother said she is not beautiful. And for him I have the magical power of reading minds, but when you listen deeply like that you understand right away. The people who listen with only half an ear cannot understand deeply. After that he revealed everything to me, and I had to explain about things, because his mother was not yet skillful enough.. Beauty is very profound, don't be attracted by just the smile or just the hair, the eyes, but you must see the depth of the beauty, but the mother did not yet know how to explain like that. The mother felt that she is not beautiful, and that's all. I knew that I needed only to listen , and even if I cannot do anything yet, I could relieve the suffering from him You must listen deeply in order to relieve the suffering of others.

Secondly, you can at least communicate with that person because in our society technology is very advanced, we have e-mail, fax, telephone, in half a second you can send a lot of news to the other side of the planet; but the communication between two persons under the same roof, parents and children, mother and daughter, sister and brother, the communication between people living in the family is so difficult because we are alienated by so many outside things. You can spend five hours on your computer without looking deeply to the person next to you who loves and cares for you. And so to listen deeply is a way to reestablish the communication between yourself and the persons around you.

[Bell]

When we read these Bodhisattva vows, we have to read relaxingly, and very profoundly so that your every word can touch the hearts of those who listen to you. We read the Bodhisattva vows in order to remind ourselves that we need to be trained in that direction. 'I invoke your name, Manjushri. I vow to follow your path in order to stop and look deeply into the heart of things, the heart of people'. These days we run very fast, like those who are pursued by ghosts, even if we are drinking tea we are still running. Running to the west, running to the east, running ten thousand miles from the reality in front of us. In order to see deeply, to understand deeply, you have to stop. You sit in front of your daughter, but you think of the events of the day, your daughter fades away in front of your eyes. You cannot see her suffering, her difficulty, and her fear. So we have to learn to stop. Without stopping, how can you see more deeply? So Samatha is stopping, and looking deeply is Vipasyana Bodhisattva Manjushri is the one who practices Vipasyana meditation, looking deeply. He or she knows how to stop, look deeply, so he practices Samatha and Vipasyana. He or she knows how to stop in order to see deep into the heart of things and in the heart of living beings around him/her. The heart here is all the states of mind of others and of yourself. That is the object of your observation, so the practice in Plum Village when you sit, when you walk, when you stand, when you eat, you have to learn to stop. Even when you practice walking meditation, you must learn to stop. Sometimes we sit in a silent meal, but we are still running. Sitting, eating mindfully, and learning to stop. There are a lot of people who are sitting and eating, but they are running in their minds. You are eating, but in your mind you are thinking of the east, the west, here and there, we let our mind run life after life. Why don't we live our lives deeply and fully? So when you do walking meditation you learn to stop your mind in order to have the capacity to look deeply. That is the quality of Manjushri. I will train myself to look at everything with all my sincerity and my wholeheartedness. I will learn to look with eyes without prejudice. The Avalokitesvara, you look without prejudice. You listen without prejudice. I vow to train myself to look without judging.

In order to understand the suffering of a Palestinian, you must really look in the way of a Palestinian. And a Palestinian must learn to understand deeply an Israeli in order to understand all his suffering, her fear. And after looking deeply in that way, you see that each side suffers anger, fear and jealousy so if we continue to punish each other, we'll not go far. It is better that we take our hands reciprocally in order to find a common solution beneficial for both sides.

We live in the sangha. We notice that two members of the sangha do not look at each other so you can come and help the sister to be close to other sister, to practice Samatha and Vipasyana. So you listen without prejudice, you look without prejudice. I learn to look deeply in order to see all the roots of all beings.

The first Noble Truth is suffering. When you look deeply into the first truth, you see the second truth, that is the impermanence element. There is the non-self element in that, and then you can understand. I will learn your way to use the sword of understanding in order to cut all the affliction. You can only cut affliction or sorrow by the sword of understanding. It means when you are angry, you are sorrowful because of that person. For you, he is bad, she is bad. With great understanding, you understand her suffering, his suffering, and his fear. And when you understand like that, your sorrow is gone because you understand him. You understand his difficulty. You are no longer sorrowful because you know that such a person must behave in such a way, and I am only the victim of his suffering, that's all. So when you understand, it's easy. That is the sword of understanding that cuts the sorrow. So I wish that you can use that sword of understanding. It means that you shine your awareness and understand a lot.

In my poem of transmission to Dharma Teacher (Thich Phap Dang), I said that the sword I gave to you, use every day. The sword of understanding to cut ignorance you must use every day. The poem I gave to Brother Phap Dang is the teaching I rediscovered on the old mountain. It means that teaching I rediscovered on the old mountain, Vulture Peak where the Buddha gave a lot of teaching. We are here, but we also live in the ultimate dimension. We see that right here is the mountain. We don't need to go to India to see it. So when somebody receives the lamp of transmission, does it mean that he is Enlightened? No, you must train yourself more. It is a tool

for you to train yourself more. So in my poem to give to Phap Dang, I said that after ten years of training, he will make shining the

lamp of wisdom of the family everywhere. The art and the sword I give to you are for you to use every day, not to put in your cupboard. Then one day, the blossoming of wisdom everywhere.

The Bodhisattva Manjushri uses the sword of understanding to cut through all the bonds of suffering. When you suffer a lot it is because you don't use the sword of understanding to understand and to cut.

Now we go to Samantabhadra. 'I invoke your name, Samantabhadra. I decide to bring the eyes and the heart to enter into life'. The eyes of whom? The eyes of Manjushri. And the heart of whom? The heart of Avalokitesvara. So you see Samantabhadra, Avalokitesvara, and Manjushri are one. It means three qualities of one person. And the three qualities complete each other. So when you go into life in order to save the world or to help, you need to have the eyes of Manjushri and the heart of Avalokitesvara. 'I vow to bring joy to one person in the morning and relieve the suffering of another person in the evening'. So the practice is not the question of speaking a lot but to do two things: to relieve the suffering of one person and to bring joy to another person. What you say is not enough. You have to really bring joy to one person in the morning and relieve the suffering of another person in the afternoon. This you can do. If you are a little Bodhisattva, you at least have to bring joy to one person in the morning and relieve the suffering of another person. If you are a bigger Bodhisattva, you bring more joy to many persons and relieve the suffering of many others. You walk in the community. I only need you to walk mindfully, to be joyful, to be happy, to be kind, to be humble, and you already give a lot of joy to people.

The joy of others is my own joy. That is the wisdom of the Buddha, of inter-being, of inter-connection. Happiness is not an individual matter. If you are joyful, the other is also joyful, if others suffer less, you also suffer less. The happiness of others is my own happiness. And I vow to bring a lot of joy in my spiritual path. In my path of service, I know that every word, every look, every act and every smile can bring a lot of happiness to people. I know that if I diligently practice, I myself will become a source of peace and joy to the person I love and to all living beings. That is the Samantabhadra vow.

Your spiritual path should be a very joyful path. I have reminded you several times, if you practice with a lot of pain, why should you enter into a practice center? People suffer a lot outside. When you enter into practice center, you must be joyful. You must have joy in the morning, joy in the afternoon and joy in the evening. When a brother or sister asks you if you are joyful, you must say with joy, "YES!" And then you have to tell people what kind of real joy you have, and if you don't have that joy, you must look more deeply in order to discover that joy. It does exist within you. Sometimes one negative incident or piece of news obsesses you and then it invades your whole mind and you forget many joyful elements in yourself. You are so completely overwhelmed by that negative incident. Meanwhile, you have a dozen other joyful things, but you have completely forgotten about them.

The practice is to observe our unlucky situation— yes, something happened—but you still can be in touch with many other joyful things in order not to be drowned in your difficulties. If you train yourself, you will see that you are in fact very rich because with every word you can bring happiness to people, every look can bring happiness to people, every small act can bring happiness to people, and even your smile can bring happiness to people. We know that if we train ourselves diligently we can become an infinite source of peace and joy. I can become a source of joy and peace for a lot of people, for those I love and also those around me. We only need to live with awareness to touch all these positive qualities in ourselves, to touch the Manjushri quality in you, the Avalokitesvara qualities in you, the Samantabhadra in you, and you will have a lot of joy to offer to people.

Now the fourth vow. 'I invoke your name, Ksitigarbha. I will learn to follow your way. I wish to be present everywhere where darkness, suffering, despair, torture, oppression exist. I decide, I am determined to come to bring light to these areas where there is darkness, where there is despair, where there is oppression; and I will bring light, I will bring hope, I will bring faith, I will bring emancipation. I vow that I will never abandon those who are caught in a despairing situation. I vow to make a link with those who have no way of escaping.'

A lot of us have been in countries where people are deprived of human rights that live in oppression. In some countries, people are so desperate that we feel that we cannot communicate the reality of their suffering with the outside world. Sometimes we even have to pour gasoline on our own body in order to burn ourselves, so people in the outside world will know that people are suffering terribly here.

In the world, there are a number of those who are unfairly jailed, they are suffering a lot and they are desperate. If we don't do anything for them, we fail in our Vow. Nowadays, there are a number of people who want to be Ksitigarbha and try to relieve the suffering of people in desperate situations. We live in a society where we have plenty of material luxuries, we are jealous for this little thing, but we don't realize that there are people who are in jail unfairly and they just want to be a person living with dignity. They are thrown in jail, and they suffer a lot. To learn the way of Ksitigarbha is to reach your hand into these most desperate situations, to those who are deprived of human rights, who are put in jail in many totalitarian countries. '

I vow to make communication with those who have no way to escape, those who live in dark jails, who have no way to call for justice, to call for human dignity. I know that hell exists everywhere on earth, and I vow not to contribute to making more hells in this world. I vow to dismantle many hells.'

We must realize that there are those who have never heard the name of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva yet they manifest these qualities every day. In big cities like Chicago, New York, Manila, Washington D.C., there are a lot of hells also. In Paris there is hell, too. So we have to discover these hells and to dismantle them in order to help people and relieve their suffering.

Sometimes we may have the notion that we didn't contribute to the creation of that hell. In fact, we are constantly creating this hell by our forgetfulness, jealousy and craving for money. We do not see that hell exists around us, so we continue to live our lives in a way that is harmful to other beings. We are creating hell around us constantly. We must make it clear that we do not want to make more hells. By our way of living mindfully, we will not act in a harmful way that would create hell around us.

When you act or speak unmindfully, you cause a lot of suffering around you. People suffer because of your unmindfulness.

'I vow to learn the way to be more stable, more solid, and profound like the earth'. The Sanskrit name Ksitigarbha means "the Bodhisattva of the earth, Earth Store." (in Chinese Ti Tsang Wang Pu Sa) . I vow to develop the stability and solidity of the earth, in order to become faithful and without discrimination, like the earth. The earth never discriminates between perfume and urine. The earth absorbs everything and transforms it into flowers. So I want to learn the quality of the earth, very solid, very profound and stable, very rich, no discrimination, in order to be the support for all those who need my support. I vow to become all of these qualities of the earth so that I will be a great support for many people.

When you pour garbage on the earth and then you pour milk and then in three months the garbage will become flowers and the milk will become flowers too. The earth has the quality to release and to accept, the quality of accepting everything and releasing every negative thing. Can we be the support of somebody else if we don't have the solidity of the earth? If you see within yourself that you are not yet solid enough, you must train yourself to become more solid.

There is one man who has the name Nicholas. He has sent us a letter from jail, from hell. From a jail in the United States. This letter was sent from hell to one Ksitigarbha. Some of our friends in the United States have developed a ministry of buying a number of the books of Thay from Parallax Press and distributing them within the prisons. They purchase the books cheaply, sometimes they may have a damaged cover or something similar so they are not able to be distributed commercially and send them into hell. And some of the prisoners in jail, after reading these books, have transformed a lot.

Nicholas's is one of many thousands of letters we receive here. Nicholas is on death row. He has been waiting to be executed for seventeen years. He had the opportunity to read Living Buddha, Living Christ in jail. On the 28th of December, 1997, he wrote:

'Dear Thay, I don't know if this letter will arrive in your hands or not, but I wish that somebody who lives at the same address as you can open this letter and read my words so that I feel relieved. I found your address in the back of the Book 'Living Buddha, Living Christ' that was offered to me. . I have been on death row for 17 years already. My life has had a lot of suffering during this time, a lot of despair. But in me there is a will to transcend all these psychological and emotional wounds. These wounds are with me and grow in jail. There are days where I struggle very hard against my anger, and there are moments when I feel I cannot transcend my anger and hate. I feel that I am crushed by my hate. But strangely, I learn to live simply from that moment of learning, the hatred toward those who have been very hard to me, cruel to me, my only vow is to survive without becoming crazy because of this hate. I hope to survive without hate, without hatred toward those who put me in jail, who have tortured me. I don't know how I can do that. I don't know how I can transcend the moment when I feel that I will go crazy or I think that I am going insane. How can I survive and transcend this difficult moment? I never think that I am better than or higher than other people are. I am quite satisfied with who I am. My only dream is that one day I will be released and somebody will come and see me and that person will say, "That person spent 20 years in jail, but he's still normal." That is my only wish.

I am an ordinary person. I am very grateful that in jail, after 17 years, I can still keep my sanity. I am not crazy yet. And with that gratitude, I can treasure what happens in my life. When I see the sunset, I feel a lot of happiness. I sit behind my jail door. I can enjoy the sunset through the little window in my cell. In the last cell that I had, for 12 years, I was only able to look at a brick wall.. In my new jail, there is a window where I can see the city with a lot of trees. And the first time I came in touch with trees, I was so moved that I cried. When I read your book, it was the first time I learned to dwell peacefully in the present moment. I understood that teaching right away. In the past, I hated all organized religions. I felt that any religion always tried to eliminate those who didn't follow them. So that is the reason why I only followed my inner search. I have only started to learn about Buddhism, but I can see already in the way of searching for something beautiful, I can learn to live deeply in the present moment, mindfully in the present moment, my material life. In this situation, I have a lot of difficulties, but I learn to treasure the short moments of awareness, living in jail. During these moments of awareness the fear and despair in me can not master me, and I tune in to the humanness in me, and I can behave like a Buddhist. I believe that if I continue, I will find transformation.

I know that if one day I am executed in a violent way, I will be able to accept that. I wish that from this garbage, I can transform into a flower, I can find peace in me. During my search for peace, I have learned to accept myself as well as those around me. My only dream is when I am released, people come to me and say, "How come after 20 years in jail, he is still a normal person?" I write this letter to you hoping that these simple words can share with you the humanness in me. I wrote to you not in the name of one person in death row, but as a person who has been sent here to jail in order to grow. To learn and to grow in a very difficult situation and in a condition where you have no hope for the future. The main idea of this letter is to tell you, Thay, that the human nature exists in me and to tell you that a death row prisoner can find peace and joy in hell. Please take good care of yourself. Love, Nicholas.

After reading this letter, I asked Sister Thuc Nghiem to send to him the book about walking meditation, and I wrote to him and asked him to practice walking meditation in his own cell, and if he can, also request permission to go outside in the prison compound to do walking meditation , and if he can help other prisoners to practice walking meditation and if they feel some peace, he also can do a lot of work for prisoners. It is very encouraging for us here in Plum Village to know that you are there practicing being in the present moment and giving a chance for the best in you to manifest. Your spiritual and blood ancestors have transmitted these jewels to you. True freedom is freedom from afflictions such as despair, anger, and hate. There are so many in the world who are not free and who suffer tremendously. They do not have a space within.

Here is another letter from jail and from hell. (...) This is from a Vietnamese prisoner. He is only in touch with Thay through the American book of Thay in jail:

" My name is Hun. I admire you a lot, and I am living in this center jail. When I read...your book, I learned a lot and I started to love human beings, living beings. Since I left my parents, I entered into the criminal way, and materialism attracted me, and so I forgot the spiritual way home. In jail, I read Being Peace and The Joyful Path , and they helped me a lot. Especially on page 14, I can feel that I have been touched with my own roots and my own ancestors. I thank you deeply for opening my eyes so that I can understand my father. I wrote a letter of reconciliation to my father. My father is an alcoholic, and he beat my mother and all of us, and so when I grew up, I did not love my father. Thanks to your book, I can see all the suffering that my father had when he was a young child. Because that page talks about meditating on your father as a five year old child. So thanks to that, I can reconcile with my father and I wrote a loving letter to him.

I want to thank you. Thanks to that, our relationship will become very good. Your book has helped a lot of prisoners around me. I want to thank you for giving us a lot of these books for us to practice. [He said] In the name of those who will be arrested who will be able to read this book and who will be transformed.[ signed Hun.]

So you don't need to go far. You just have to look deeply in order to be in touch with this hell. And your arm can reach very far. A sangha in the UK also sent a lot of Plum Village newsletters in Vietnamese and English to prisoners of Vietnamese and other origins. And also books. Parallax Press has been generous enough to give books that have been sent back and forth, so maybe their covers are a little bit damaged, but the text itself is perfectly fine. So they send them to the jail.

There is another prisoner who wrote me a letter that went like this: "One day, I was following my breath and standing on my staircase. I saw other prisoners running, full of anger and hate. I saw that they were like a bomb about to explode. I felt a lot of compassion for them. I wished that they could know how to breathe like me and how to enjoy the present moment like me and would not suffer and be full of hatred like that."

There is another man who wrote a book it is called, "Finding Freedom" (available from Parallax Press). The author of this book is in jail on death row. He took the Five Wonderful Mindfulness Trainings with a Tibetan monk. His name is Jarvis Jay Masters. In one chapter of the book he reports how he took the Five Wonderful Precepts, how he is in touch with Buddhism. One day, the nearby prisoner was fighting, beating up his wall and shouting, " Why, why?" Jarvis was breathing and smiling. And the prisoner who was beating his wall said, "You stupid guy. You have a lot of tobacco, why don't you give me some, half of your tobacco?" Jarvis was already practicing Buddhism, so he did not smoke. And so the other man beat the wall, he said, "Who are you?" He said, "I am Buddhist. I do not smoke. And if you ask for some cigarettes or some tobacco, you have to be kind and ask politely. You cannot behave in such a way. Maybe the guy on the other side has some tobacco but not me. If you behave in such a way even if I had tobacco, I wouldn't give it to you. You have to become very kind. So sit quietly. I'll try to find a way to help you."

Jarvis had already abandoned using tobacco. But he still had some tobacco. In the past, he used to smoke tobacco a lot, but when he became a Buddhist, he quit. Meanwhile, he had been storing up his weekly allowance in order to share with other prisoners as a way of spreading the Dharma! So he took a little bit—that much, just a little—and then he wrapped it and he passed it to the other cell. He wrapped the tobacco in one photocopied page of my book Being Peace! It was the first page of Being Peace. So with the tobacco he had left, he divided it into 20 parts. He had received a photocopy of Being Peace from a friend. After he had read it, he loved and appreciated it so much that his friend outside of jail gave him a real copy of Being Peace. He still had the other photocopy of the book. So he used them to wrap the tobacco when he gave some tobacco to the other side. Three days after the man had received the first page he gave another piece of tobacco with the second page of Being Peace. Then the man would ask him just for the pages. So he still had the book for himself, but he gave away the whole photocopied version of Being Peace page by page. The man on the other side after he finished reading the book, he also practiced breathing mindfully and dwelling in the present moment. Then the cell would become very calm. Jarvis received some love from that prisoner with the tobacco.

The other prisoner was released soon after because he was not on death row. And when the other one was released, he stopped to thank Jarvis and both of them recited the same sentence from the book. When he said farewell, suddenly the prisoner

inside uttered this sentence, and the one outside uttered the same sentence at exactly the same time: Both of them recited this at the same time in front of the guard. If you are peaceful, if you are calm, if you are happy, if you can smile, then the people in your family will smile and in your society will smile, and they can enjoy the peace radiating from you.

So we must see that Ksitigarbha is not merely a legendary personality. Ksitigarbha is in you, in me, and in many others everywhere. We only need to train ourselves to become a Ksitigarbha, then our hand will be able to reach into the places of the most terrible suffering, darkness and oppression.

[Bell]

END.

## Transcending Injustice: The Tale of Quan Am Thi Kinh

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Dear friends.

Today is the twenty-eighth of July, 1996, we are in the Lower Hamlet and we are going to speak English.

There was a little girl whose name was Kinh, who was born in North Vietnam a long, long time ago. Her parents would have preferred a boy, but a girl was born to them, but they were still happy and they named her Kinh. Kinh means "respect, reverence." That is a very good name. You respect people, you respect animals, you respect life including the plants and the minerals. Reverence. Reverence for life, for what is there inside of you and around you. Kinh was a very beautiful child. As a little girl she was already very beautiful, like a flower. Kinh used to go the Buddhist temple in the village with her mother to offer lotus flowers to the Buddha and to listen to the Dharma talks given by the high monk. She loved the Dharma.

There was a very deep intention in her to become something like a monk, because she saw the monks living their lives very happily and helping so many people. She wished that she could become a monk, because practicing, living in the temple—everything—seemed to be very beautiful and calm. She loved the manner of the monks, going back and forth with gentleness, touching everything with reverence. She just loved the Dharma, even though she was very small. She inquired about the possibility of becoming a monk, and they said no, not for girls. Because Buddhism had just been introduced into Vietnam, there were only monasteries for monks; perhaps there were one or two temples for nuns, but they were very rare. In that time, there was no airplane, there was no bus, so she could not imagine that she could travel far. She was not happy at the idea that she could never become a monk because she was a girl. A kind of frustration was in her—she believed that as a girl one could also practice like a monk, living the Dharma happily like a monk.

She grew up into a beautiful girl and her parents wanted to marry her to someone in the neighborhood. In olden times, weddings were arranged by parents, and you had to obey them because they had their wisdom, they knew who was good for you. The deepest desire of parents was to see their daughter be wedded to a young man with a bright future. One morning they received a letter from the parents of a young man, asking whether they can marry her to their son. The young man's name was Sung Tin—"scholar of goodness," "student of goodness." I don't know how good he was, how bright a human he was, but it seemed that he was born into a family of outstanding tradition, a noble family. He seemed to have a bright future, because he was a good student and he might pass the examination and become a high official in the government. The dream of all students in the past was to pass the high exam and be selected by the king to be a minister, a chief of province, and so on.

Kinh had to obey them to become the wife of Sung Tin, although her love, her deepest desire, was to become a nun. There was no way at all; it was not like in our time. In our time, if a young lady wants to become a nun, she might pick up the telephone and inquire about the existence of nunneries. But in that time Kinh did not have any opportunity to do so. So she buried her desire deep inside and had to obey her parents and be wedded to that young man, Sung Tin. Of course the young wife had to support her husband in his studies. Nourishing the husband, supporting the husband so that the husband can succeed in his studies was the main task of a young wife of that time.

The family of Sung Tin was rich, so Kinh did not have to work very hard to support her husband. There were, however, many young wives who had to sell rice in a market or carry rice in the heat of the summertime in order to earn enough money to support their husbands to continue their studies. This was not the case of Kinh because her in-law family was very rich. So she only took care of the housework, cleaned, cooked, sewed his clothes, and so on. Kinh was trained very thoroughly as a housekeeper by her parents. One day while she was mending some cloth, her husband Sung Tin was studying beside her and fell asleep. Students want to study as much as possible, they want to stuff in as many books and as much knowledge as possible. So he was trying to do the same thing. He studied day and night, and that day, reading a book close to his wife, he fell asleep.

When Kinh looked at Sung Tin, she saw that a few moustache hairs were not cut evenly. So out of her love and care she used a pair of scissors, trying to trim those three or four hairs. But suddenly her husband woke up. And in that kind of state of being, he thought that she was trying to kill him! So he shouted, he screamed. He screamed. I don't know how deep their love was, how much they understood each other, but this is what happened. So his parents came and asked, "Why are you screaming like that?" He said, "Well, I was dozing. When I woke up, I saw her using a pair of scissors like that. So I don't know." His parents said, "It does happen that wives who are not faithful may kill their husband, because it's in their mind to have other desires, other men. So we don't want you any more as a daughter-in-law. We'd like to send you back to your home." Kinh tried to explain, but the parents did not want to accept.

When I practiced looking deeply into this, I saw that the cause of her being dismissed as a daughter-in-law was not suspicion, but jealousy. Since the time the young man married he spent all of his time with his wife, and the parents felt that they had lost their son. This new woman who came to their home monopolized entirely their son so they acted on this kind of jealousy without even knowing it. So they wrote a letter to her parents and asked them to

come and take back their daughter. Imagine how great was the suffering undergone by that family. To them their daughter was perfect, their daughter was very true, very faithful. It was a kind of injustice. And that was the first injustice that Kinh had to suffer, to bear, to accept. So they brought her home. Her parents believed her that she did not have the intention to kill her husband. It was just a misfortune, and the three of them suffered.

[Bell]

But Kinh had learned something from the conjugal life. She saw that people are full of wrong perceptions. Even in that wealthy family, they made each other suffer very much. The love that she felt in that family was not enough to make her happy, to make her bloom like a flower. That kind of love, that kind of life, did not satisfy her deepest need. So the idea of becoming a nun suddenly re-emerged. She spent many nights thinking of how to become a monk in order to practice in a Buddhist temple, so that she would be able to embrace the Dharma entirely and devote her life to the practice of the Dharma.

One night she decided that she would disguise herself as a young man and try to be accepted by a monastery. She did not think that she should go to a temple close to her family, because people would recognize her and her parents would not allow her to go. She decided to go far away because there were temples everywhere. She had to walk something like one hundred miles in order to go so far that even her parents would not know where she was. And she did not tell her friends that she wanted to become a monk. Because if she did, her parents would go looking for her in the temples and would very soon discover her. She kept her desire very secret.

One day she just disappeared with some of her belongings and left behind a letter that said, "Dear Mother, dear Father, I have something I love very much I want to accomplish. So please forgive me for not being able to be home to take care of you, because this desire in me is so big." You know that desire was bodhicitta—the desire to practice the Dharma and to bring happiness to many people, because people suffer so much everywhere and are caught up in their wrong perceptions; they do injustices to each other every day. She didn't want to repeat that kind of life again, she wanted to become a monk. So after having walked more than one hundred miles, she found a temple—a temple named Phap Van, Dharma Cloud, not very far from Hanoi.

When she came to the temple disguised as a young man, as a student, she asked to see the abbot. She attended the Dharma talk and was so moved that she waited until the people all went home, approached the monk, and asked to be ordained as a novice monk. The monk asked her to sit down and he said, "Young man, why do you want to become a monk?" And she said, "Dear teacher, I have seen that everything is impermanent, that nothing can last forever. Everything is like a dream, everything is like the flash of lightning. When I looked at a cloud in the sky, first I saw the cloud having the form of a dog, and in no time at all, the form of dog is transformed. I saw the cloud now in the form of a shirt. Everyone is trying to get fame and profit and money in the world and they don't seem to be really happy. I want to have true happiness, and I believe that only in the Dharma could I find peace and happiness." After having said that, she stayed quiet and the monk congratulated her, "Young man, you have understood the teaching of impermanence and I hope you succeed in the practice as a monk." So he allowed her to stay in the temple, and three months later she was ordained as a novice monk.

Her Dharma name was Kinh Tam. He retained the name Kinh, "reverence," and he added the name Tam is "the heart." Reverence of the Heart or The Heart of Reverence. My students all bear the Dharma name "heart." "Source of the heart," "Door of the heart," everything is "of the heart." So they share some of the new novice's name.

Kinh Tam practiced very well, very diligently. She was very intelligent. She studied, she learned the sutras very quickly and she enjoyed very much the life of a young monk. Her teacher loved her very much and he always believed that this was a young man. The young novice was very handsome. Although she was disguised as a young man, although she did not wear anything—gold or perfume and things like that—she was still very handsome as a young "monk," and that drew a danger to her. Because down in the village there was the daughter of the wealthiest family, who would come to the temple every fortnight to offer incense, flowers, and so on, with her mother. The first time she saw the young monk, she fell in love with him right away.

I don't think that it was because of his face; his face was beautiful, yes. But there was something more than the appearance of a young man. The young monk practiced mindfulness very well—we have to call her "he"—he practiced walking mindfully, drinking mindfully, doing everything mindfully. And that is why he looked very beautiful. Because people in society are not that beautiful; they are always in a hurry, they only run, they only do things quickly, they don't have that freedom, that relaxation, that kind of peace that is expressed through the way you look, through the way you do things, through the way you sit down, through the way you walk. And that is why the young lady fell in love with the young monk right away.

Her name is Mau. Mau means "color." What color, I don't know. I don't blame her. I don't blame her because the monk was very beautiful. You can call him "handsome," but he was more than handsome, he was beautiful because he had peace within him. So if there is a lady who falls in love with a monk, that is not something extraordinary, that does happen. I remember there was one time a man who came to Plum Village and who asked Sister Jina, "You are such a beautiful lady, why have you become a nun? That is a pity, that is a loss." After some silence Sister Jina said, "If you see me as beautiful, it is because I have become a nun. If I had not become a nun, I would not be as agreeable, as pleasant as you may

see."

That is true, when you become a monk or a nun, you become much more beautiful. You adorn yourself with peace, with mindfulness, with the practice of the Dharma, and that is why you emanate that kind of beauty that is rare in society. So I really don't blame Mau at all. If I was Mau, I would fall in love with the young novice also. She tried to talk to him, tried to find opportunities to be alone with the young monk, Kinh Tam. But Kinh Tam always seemed to avoid her; it was very frustrating. Sometimes she tried to guess in advance the way the young monk would go, and run to wait for him, but when he saw her, he would turn and go into another direction. She tried several times to express her love to the young monk, but he was very determined to continue practicing as a monk.

She was very frustrated. She did not know how to transform her love. She did not understand the Dharma. She only practiced Buddhism in a very shallow way—going to the temple, offering a lot of bananas, sweet rice, and flowers and doing a lot of prostrations. She did not know how to practice in order to take care of her desire, her anger, and so on. When you go to the temple, you have to learn the Dharma. You have to change yourself in the practice of the Dharma and not do like Mau. Her love for him was so deep, and she was deeply frustrated. That is why, one day, when her parents were not home, she called into her room the young man who worked as a servant, an attendant, in the family. He took care of the garden and the housework, and during the night—I think it was a full moon night—she could not bear her love any more. So she called him in and she allowed him to have sexual intercourse with her, and during the act she imagined the young man as the young novice. It was stated in the story very clearly that in that state of being half awake, she imagined the young man as the beautiful novice.

The accident happened. And a few months later she felt that she was pregnant. She tried to hide it from her father and mother, but it became more and more apparent. The parents asked, "Why are you like that my daughter? You don't want to eat anything, you refuse eating rice, you eat only very sour things." She said, "No, I am perfectly all right, my parents. I just don't feel well enough in my body, that's all. Maybe my blood needs purification." But in a few days, she was summoned by the council of the village together with her parents, because in the village they had noticed that the young lady without a husband had become pregnant. They set up a kind of court and asked her to tell them with whom she had slept in order to become pregnant like that.

So she thought for a long time: "The young man was already chased away. Even if I tell the truth, people wouldn't believe me. The head of the village said that I should tell them the truth, and if I name the young man, I will have the opportunity to have him as an official husband. Why don't I tell them that the man who slept with me is the novice Kinh Tam practicing in the Phap Van temple?" So she said, "Respected elders, I used to go to the temple and I fell in love with the young novice Kinh Tam over there. And both of us could not bear our love not being fulfilled, that is why we have made the mistake. So please forgive us."

The head of the village sent someone to summon the family of the temple: the monk, the novice, and a few other people from the temple. When Kinh Tam arrived, she was told that Mau had declared that "he" had slept with her and made her pregnant, and the head of council said, "Kinh Tam, young novice, you have already decided to become a monk, why didn't you practice the precepts? You have slept with a young woman in the village. What do you have to say?" And the young monk said, "No, I practiced my precept. I never slept with anyone in the village. Please reconsider. This is injustice. Please be understanding. Please have compassion. I have not done anything like that." But when the head of the village turned toward Mau, she continued to confirm that it was the young monk who had slept with her and caused her to be pregnant. And the young novice firmly denied this. "No, as a young monk I practice deeply my precepts. I have never done that. The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha are witness to my honesty."

Finally, they had to use whips. "You have to tell the truth, otherwise you will be beaten with a whip thirty times. You have to confess that you have slept with Mau." Then they tied her up to a pillar and they ordered her to be beaten thirty times by the whip. That is the kind of punishment used in the past. The whipping was very, very strong and the blood began to penetrate, to come out into the cloth of the young monk. But "he" did not give in. "He" said, "No, I am innocent, please reconsider." And after Mau saw that, she said, "Please, thirty lashes are enough." She felt pity for the young novice. Because she was the daughter of a wealthy family, her request had some weight. So they allowed the novice to go home. When they went back to the temple, other people wanted to take care of the young novice but the young novice said, "No I will take care of myself. I can make the bandage, I will take care of the wound on my body," because she did not want others to discover the fact that she was not a young man.

After taking care of the wounds inflicted on her by the whips, she presented herself to her teacher, and her teacher said, "My son, I don't know, I'm not sure. I don't know whether you have done it or not. I really don't know. If you have done it, then I wish you would practice deeply the practice of Beginning Anew every day. And if you have not done it, please also practice forbearance—shanti-paramita—and try to find the joy in the practice." That was all of his teaching. And because of that, she was requested by other people in the temple to move into the gate of the temple and stay there, and not to stay together with other monks. You know, every temple has a triple gate, and the tower bell was very close to the triple gate, and now Kinh Tam was ordered to go and live alone in the triple gate so that the population of the village could not blame the sangha, because there was already suspicion.

I don't know whether if I was the teacher of Kinh Tam I would allow her to continue to stay

with me in the compound of the sangha. I don't know, because my time is different and that was a very old time and people were still full of prejudices, and so on. And I would have had enough wisdom to know whether my student had done it or not because I always try to practice good communication with my students and with my insight, with my mindfulness, I would know that he has done it or not. Because I am not there to blame my student, I am there only to help him or her. So she would tell me the truth. When the baby was born, Mau did not know what to do. She did not want at all to tell people that this was a child coming from a servant. That would be very bad for the reputation of her noble family. To die was preferable to saying that she has slept with a servant. That was something she could not bear, and her family could not bear. You have made a mistake, you have done something wrong, but you have no courage to admit your wrongness and you blame other people—that is something that happens every day. So finally she brought the baby to the novice. She brought the baby to the triple gate of the temple and said, "Novice, this is your child. Why don't you receive it?" Then she put it on the steps and she went away. When the baby started to cry, the novice said, "Well, now the child is abandoned. If I don't take him, who will take him? I am practicing compassion and understanding. If I don't take him and try to protect him, who will?" So he said, "Leave it to me!" And he picked up the baby.

[Bell]

The baby was hungry and the novice did not have milk. So she took the baby and went into the hamlet and tried to beg for some milk. Every day she had to go to the village and ask for some milk for her baby. There were people who were moved by the act of the young novice, but there were many people who said, "Well, how could he practice as a monk if he does things like this—sleeping with a woman and when the woman gave him the baby, accepting it, and now trying to raise the baby as a father. How can someone practice the Dharma in that way?" The novice felt that people didn't understand her, and yet she continued to practice forbearance because she was able to feel the peace and the joy of living with the Dharma.

If she wanted to get rid of that injustice, it would not be very difficult—just declare to the village council and to her teacher that she is a girl. And a few minutes later she would be free from that kind of blaming, from that kind of suffering. Why hadn't she done it? Because she loved the Dharma so much, she wanted so much to continue as a monk, that is why she did not give up. When you are in love with something very deeply, when you feel so much happiness with that object of your love, then you have the courage to bear all kinds of injustice. So being beaten, being misunderstood, being blamed by many people, she could still go on because she had the pleasure, the happiness, of being a monk, of practicing the Dharma.

In our days, there are people who live in the Sangha and who encounter some difficulties and think of leaving the Sangha. They don't have that kind of forbearance. They cannot bear little injustices inflicted on them because their desire, their happiness is not large enough. Therefore the key is whether you love it a lot, you treasure it a lot, you want it a lot, whether your heart is huge or not. If your heart is small, then you cannot bear injustice inflicted on you. Understanding and love are what help your heart to grow bigger and bigger. That is the practice of the four unmeasurable hearts—loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. Because your heart can grow as big as the cosmos; the growth of your heart can never end. If you are like a big river, you can receive any amount of dirt—it will not affect you, and you are able to transform the dirt very easily.

In the Dharma talk in English preceding this one, I used that image offered by the Buddha. If you put an amount of dirt in a small container of water, then that water has to be thrown away, people cannot drink it. But if you throw that amount of dirt into a huge river, people in the city continue to drink from the river, because the river is so immense. There does not have to be suffering because of that amount of dirt. Overnight that dirt will be transformed by the water, by the mud within the heart of the river. So if your heart is big as the river, you can receive any amount of injustice and still live with happiness, and you can transform overnight the injustices inflicted on you. If you still suffer, it means that your heart is still not large enough. That is the teaching of forbearance in Buddhism. You don't try to bear, you don't try to suppress your suffering. You only practice in order for your heart to expand as big as a river. Then you don't have to bear, you don't have to suffer.

There are ways to make your heart big. That is the practice of looking deeply in order for you to understand. The moment when you understand, your compassion arises. And that compassion will allow you to go on, allow you not to suffer, not to look at other people with the eyes of irritation and hatred. That is the real practice of forbearance—you don't have to suffer. Forbearance in the context of the Buddhist teaching is not to try to swallow the injustice, or to suppress the injustice, but to embrace it entirely with your big heart. So every morning you have to go to your heart, touch it, and ask, "My heart, my darling, have you grown overnight a little bit bigger?" We have to visit our heart every day in order to see whether our heart still continues to grow unlimited, to grow great. "Growing great" is the term used by Buddha while he was teaching about the four unmeasurable minds. Your heart of compassion becomes larger. It grows great all the time, your heart of loving kindness, your heart of joy, your heart of equanimity. That is why paramita is sometimes translated by the term "[ph: vo que]." [Thây writes on blackboard] It means "the highest point, the limit." [ph: vo que] means "no point all highest or limit." "[ph: Que]" means extreme, like a [ph: Ba kuk], the northernmost or the southernmost tip of the earth called [ph: Ba kuk]—north pole. It is an extreme, this is the limit. But how our compassion, our loving kindness, our joy, our equanimity knows no limit—that is why these four minds are called "unmeasurable minds" because they always grow and grow, without stopping. They grow into a river, and then they grow into an ocean, and they continue. The more your heart becomes bigger and bigger, the easier you can bear, or accept, injustice without suffering.



A few days after the young monk received the baby and adopted him and tried to nourish him, he was summoned by his teacher: "My child, why have you done that? You have not slept with the lady, it is not your baby, but why have you received it? It does not seem that this is making a good reputation for our Sangha." I do not know whether, if I were the teacher I would do like him, very afraid of my prestige. But Kinh Tam bowed to him and said, "My dear teacher, I have learned in a sutra that if you build a stupa of seven stories, and if you build one thousand of them, the merit would not be as important as the merit of saving the life of a living being. That is why I have accepted this baby and try to bring it up." That is what the young monk told his teacher.

The novice learned to sing lullabies. So in the village they heard sometimes the big bell and the gatha, "Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true self. May the sound of this bell penetrate deep into the cosmos . . .," and so on. And sometimes they could hear, "Sleep well, sleep well, my baby . . . ." These two things mingled with each other. I believe that the novice practiced well, singing the lullaby as well as the gatha, because both of them have the flavor of the Dharma in them.

When the little boy was grown up, Kinh Tam became very sick, and she knew that she would die in a few days. So she wrote a letter to her parents and she wrote down their exact address, and she told the boy that after her passing away, he had to try his best to go back to her original village and present this letter to her mother and father. She also wrote a letter to her teacher. Two letters. After she passed away, the boy did as he had been told. He went to the teacher and submitted the letter of his "father" and also he asked for the permission to depart in order to go to the original village of his "father." After reading the letter, the monk was very surprised so he asked two nuns to come to examine and all the nuns reported that the young novice was not a boy, but a girl. Then everyone was very surprised, and the monk sent a messenger to the head of the village. The head of the village was very surprised, also. So he convened a meeting and sent a delegation to the temple for the verification of the fact. After having verified that, he announced to the whole village the truth and asked the family of Mau, Color, to come and answer their questions.

And Mau's wealthy family had to pay a very heavy kind of tax to the village, and they had to pay all the expenses of the funeral organized by the temple. In the Vietnamese poem written about the story we have the full text of the letter. Kinh Tam requested the forgiveness of her father and mother, saying that she had not told them where she had been because she desired so much to practice as a monk. She said that she practiced like that not only for herself, but for the whole family and for many living beings, and she hoped that they would understand and forgive her, and receive this young man as someone very close to the family although he is only an adopted child. Her parents cried a lot. It had been so many years without hearing anything from their daughter and suddenly this morning they received a letter announcing that she was no longer alive. So they cried a lot, and they set out for the Phap Van temple. They also told the former husband, Mr. Sung Tin, to come along. They spent many days traveling; and when they arrived at the temple, they saw the banner bearing their daughter's name, and a very long procession. All the people in the village came to attend the funeral service. They were so moved, and many people were crying.

If you practice, you have to practice like that. That is the absolutely perfect way to practice. Even if injustices are inflicted on you, you continue to have a lot of energy, you continue the Way. You don't blame anyone for your suffering. Practicing like that is real practice. When her family arrived, they participated in the funeral service and were received as distinguished guests by the temple and the village. After that, the whole village organized a ceremony to transfer all the merits to Kinh Tam and to practice *giai oan*. *Giai oan* means "untie the injustice." And it was said at the end of the story that the Buddha appeared and announced that Kinh Tam had arrived in a state of enlightenment, and she was now acting as one manifested body of Avalokiteshvara. Her name is Quan Am Thi Kinh. She is a Vietnamese Avalokiteshvara and the story is known by everyone. In the temple, many people know the poem by heart and it is the perfect model for the practice of forbearance.

All of us feel at times that we are victims of injustice. We suffer so much injustice, even from the people we love. And we want to repair that injustice, we want to cry out. We want to practice untying the injustice that we have borne for so long in the past. That is why we are always ready to talk to other people about our suffering and the injustice we have suffered. Maybe deep in our heart, we want justice to be done by any kind of means. Maybe we want a military solution. Sometimes you want to use a gun. Sometimes you want to use a stick. Sometimes you want to use an army. As a nation, if you feel that you are a victim of injustice, you are tempted to use a military solution. But if you are not a nation, you are inclined to use other kinds of revenge—using sticks, hiring someone to beat the other person, using a gun, or you want to manipulate the situation, you want to use political means in order to repair your injustice.

But according to the teaching of the Buddha, you can only repair that injustice in you, you can only transcend it, by transforming it. The only way is to practice the four immeasurable minds—*maitri*, which is loving kindness; *karuna*, which is compassion; *mudita*, joy; and *upeksha*, equanimity. And in order to cultivate these four qualities, you have to use the practice of looking deeply, namely, calming and looking—*samatha* and *vipasyana*. You do your best to remain calm, to remain concentrated. You do your best to look deeply into the nature of your suffering, and suddenly understanding comes and your heart begins to expand. Suddenly you feel that you have the power to bear that injustice; you can survive with that, you can live with that, and you even can transform it.

The Buddha said that when you are struck by one arrow, you suffer. But if a second arrow comes exactly to the same spot, you suffer not twice, but maybe thirty times more. When you

suffer something and you get angry, your suffering will be not only doubled, but thirty times more intense. You amplify your suffering by your ignorance, your anger, your frustration, your hatred. Why do you have to suffer that much? In fact, why do you have to receive the second arrow? With one arrow, and with some understanding and practice, you would not suffer much and you would be able to remove the arrow very soon. But because of our ignorance, our lack of practice, we become angry, we let hatred and despair overcome us—that is why our suffering has become unbearable. This is the teaching of the Buddha in the Samyutta Nikaya (Samyutta Nikaya: 4, 210) about the first arrow and the second arrow. The second arrow is ignorance.

The other day we used the image of a little child tearing apart a butterfly. The little child does not know that doing that is inflicting a lot of injustice and suffering on the little insect. The little child just wants to play. He doesn't know that tearing apart a butterfly like this is making a living being suffer. The little child is doing it out of ignorance. When we tell the little child, "My darling, do you know that tonight the little butterfly cannot go home to his parents? What if you cannot go back tonight to your parents? They would suffer a lot." If you tell a child that, the next time she will not tear a butterfly with her two hands. She will be able to protect life. "Lord, forgive them because they do not know what they are doing." People make each other suffer, and they don't know it. They act out of anger or hatred; they don't have happiness within themselves. They are overwhelmed with ignorance, with hatred, with anger, and that is why they have made people around them suffer. And we may be doing the same thing, but we don't know it.

[Bell].

It happens from time to time everywhere that a person will use a gun to kill people in a market place; suddenly in a high school someone with a gun just appears like that and kills three, four, five students without any reason at all. Your daughter, your son, goes to school as usual. And that morning it happens that it is your daughter who was killed by that crazy man. That is a form of injustice. And you might bear a lot of hatred toward that man. But if you look into that man and look deeply, you see that that man is full of craziness, that man is full of ignorance, that man is full of hatred, of alienation. When a man holds a gun and shoots at people like that without reason, there must be a reason. And people like him or like her, they do exist in the world. How could a man become like he is? How was his family, how was his society, how was his education? Did anyone take care of him at all? Of course, if we were there we would try our best to prevent him from continuing to kill other people. We are urged to act right away, put him in a situation where he cannot continue to harm people, even to lock him into a prison cell; we have to do that. But we have to do that with wisdom and compassion. We don't do that with anger and hatred. We don't do it out of the will to punish the man, because the man has been suffering a lot.

# *Transforming Negative Habit Energies*

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My dear friends, today is the 6th of August, 1998, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We are going to speak English.

Today I would like to speak a little bit about Heaven, or Paradise, and Hell. I have been in Paradise, and I have been in Hell also, so I have some experience to share with you. I think if you remember well, you know that you have also been in Paradise, and you have also been in Hell. Hell is hot, and it is difficult.

The Buddha, in one of his former lives, was in Hell. Before he became a Buddha he had suffered a lot in many lives. He made a lot of mistakes, like all of us. He made himself suffer, and he made people around him suffer. Sometimes he made very big mistakes, and that is why in one of his previous lives he was in Hell. There is a collection of stories about the lives of the Buddha, and there are many hundreds of stories like that. These stories are collected under the title *Jataka Tales*. Among these hundreds of stories, I remember one very vividly. I was seven years old, very young, and I read that story about the Buddha, and I was very shocked. But I did not fully understand that story.

The Buddha was in Hell because he had done something wrong, extremely wrong, that caused a lot of suffering to himself and to others. That is why he found himself in Hell. In that life of his, he hit the bottom of suffering, because that Hell was the worst of all Hells. With him there was another man, and together they had to work very hard, under the direction of a soldier who was in charge of Hell. It was dark, it was cold, and at the same time it was very hot. The guard did not seem to have a heart. It did not seem that he knew anything about suffering. He did not know anything about the feelings of other people, so he just beat up the two men in Hell. He was in charge of the two men, and his task was to make them suffer as much as possible.

I think that guard also suffered a lot. It looked like he didn't have any compassion within him. It looked like he didn't have any love in his heart. It looked like he did not have a heart. He behaved like a robber. When looking at him, when listening to him, it did not seem that one could contact a human being, because he was so brutal. He was not sensitive to people's suffering and pain. That is why he was beating the two men in Hell, and making them suffer a lot. And the Buddha was one of these two men in one of his previous lives.

The guard had an instrument with three iron points, and every time he wanted the two men to go ahead, he used this to push them on the back, and of course blood came out of their backs. He did not allow them to relax; he was always pushing and pushing and pushing. He himself also looked like he was being pushed by something behind him. Have you ever felt that kind of pushing behind your back? Even if there was no one behind you, you have felt that you were being pushed and pushed to do things you don't like to do, and to say the things you don't like to say, and in doing that you created a lot of suffering for yourself and the people around you. Maybe there is something behind us that is pushing and pushing. Sometimes we say horrible things, and do horrible things, that we did not want to say or do, yet we were pushed by something from behind. So we said it, and we did it, even if we didn't want to do it. That was what happened to the guard in Hell: he tried to push, because he was being pushed. He caused a lot of damage to the two men. The two men were very cold, very hungry, and he was always pushing and beating them and causing them a lot of problems.

One afternoon, the man who was the Buddha in a former life saw the guard treating his companion so brutally that something in him rose up. He wanted to protest. He knew that if he intervened, if he said anything, if he tried to prevent the guard beating the other person, that he would be beaten himself. But that something was pushing up in him, so that he wanted to intervene, and he wanted to say: "Don't beat him so much. Why don't you allow him to relax? Why do you have to stab him and to beat him and to push him so much?" Deep within the Buddha was a pressure coming up, and he wanted to intervene, even knowing perfectly well that if he did, he would be beaten by the guard. That impulse was very strong in him, and he could not stand it anymore. He turned around, and he faced the guard without any heart, and said, "Why don't you leave him alone for a moment? Why do you keep beating him and pushing him like that? Don't you have a heart?"

That was what he said, this man who was to be the Buddha. When the guard saw him protesting like that, and heard him, he was very angry, and he used his fork, and he planted it right in the chest of the Buddha. As a result, the Buddha died right away, and he was reborn the very same minute into the body of a human being. He escaped Hell, and became a human being living on earth, just because compassion was born in him, strong enough for him to have the courage to intervene to help his fellow man in Hell.

When I read this story, I was astonished, and I came to the conclusion that even in Hell there was compassion. That was a very relieving truth: even in Hell there is compassion. Can you imagine? And wherever compassion is, it's not too bad. Do you know something? The other fellow saw the Buddha die. He was angry, and for the first time he was touched by compassion: the other person must have had some love, some compassion to have the courage to intervene for his sake. That gave rise to some compassion in him also. That is why he looked at the guard, and he said, "My friend was right, you don't have a heart. You can only create suffering for yourself and for other people. I don't think that you are a happy person. You have killed him." And after he said that, the guard was also very angry at him, and he used his fork, and planted the fork in the stomach of the second man, who also died right away, and was reborn as a human being on earth. Both of them escaped Hell, and had a chance to begin anew on earth, as full human beings.

What happened to the guard, the one who had no heart? He felt very lonely, because in that Hell there were only three people and now the other two were dead. He began to see that these two were not very kind, or very nice, but to have people living

with us is a wonderful thing. Now the two other people were dead, and he was alone, utterly alone there. He could not bear that kind of loneliness, and Hell became very difficult for him. Out of that suffering he learned something: he learned that you cannot live alone. Man is not our enemy. You cannot hate man, you cannot kill man, you cannot reduce man to nothingness, because if you kill man, with whom will you live? He made a vow that if he had to take care of other people in Hell, he would learn how to deal with them in a nicer way, and a transformation took place in his heart. In fact, he did have a heart. To believe that he did not have a heart is wrong-everyone has a heart. We need something or someone to touch that heart, to transform it into a human heart. So this time the feeling of loneliness, the desire to be with other humans, was born in him. That is why he decided that if he had to guard other people in Hell, he would know how to deal with them with more compassion. At that time, the door of Hell opened, and a bodhisattva appeared, with all the radiance of a bodhisattva. The bodhisattva said, " Goodness has been born in you, so you don't have to endure Hell very long. You will die quickly and be reborn as a human very soon."

That is the story I read when I was seven. I have to confess that at the time I read it I did not understand it fully. Nevertheless, the story had a strong impact on me. I think that was my favorite Jataka tale. I found that in Hell, there can be compassion. It is possible for us to give birth to compassion even in the most difficult situations. In our daily lives, from time to time, we create Hell for ourselves and for our beloved ones. The Buddha had done that several times before he became a Buddha. He created suffering for himself and for other people, including his mother and his father. That is why, in one of his former lives, he had to be in Hell. Hell is a place where we can learn a lesson in order to grow, and the Buddha learned well in Hell. Do you know what happened after he was reborn as a human? He continued to practice compassion, and from that day on he continued to make progress in the direction of understanding and love, and he has never gone back to Hell again, except when he wanted to go there and help the people who suffer.

I have been in Hell, many kinds of Hell, and I have also noticed that even in Hell compassion is possible. With the practice of Buddhist meditation, you may very well prevent Hell manifesting. And if Hell has manifested, you have ways to transform Hell into something that is much more pleasant. When you get angry, Hell is born. Anger makes you suffer a lot, and not only do you suffer, but the people you love also suffer at the same time. When we don't know how to practice, from time to time we create Hell in our own families. When we went to school, our teachers never helped us to deal with these difficulties. He or she did not teach us how to transform Hell into something better, like Paradise. But when you come to a practice center like Plum Village, the brothers and sisters who live here will be able to tell you how to prevent Hell manifesting. If it happens that Hell is there, what can you do for Hell to be transformed into an atmosphere of calm, of coolness, of joy?

Today I would like the young people to learn more about this practice of transforming Hell into something that is more pleasant. You know that the practices of mindful breathing, of mindful walking, of smiling, are very important. You think that you can walk-of course you can walk. You think that you can breathe-in fact, you breathe every day, all day and all night. You think that you can smile. Yes, but the smile here is a little bit different, the breath here is a little bit different, the walking here is a little bit different. We call it mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful smiling, and if you master these methods of practice, you have instruments to transform Hell into Heaven.

Hell can be created by Father, or Mother, or sister, or brother, or yourself. You have created Hell many times in your family, and every time Hell is there, not only do the other people suffer, but you also suffer. So how to make compassion arise in one of you? I think that is the key of the practice. If among you three or four people, there is one person who has compassion inside, one person who is capable of smiling mindfully, of breathing mindfully, of walking mindfully, she or he can be the savior of the whole family. He or she will play the role of the Buddha in Hell, because compassion is born in him first, and that compassion will be seen and touched by someone else, and someone else. It may be that Hell can be transformed in just one minute or less. It is wonderful!

When you are in school you learn a lot of writing and reading and mathematics and science, and many more things, but you don't learn these kinds of things. I think that the monks and the nuns, the brothers and sisters here at Plum Village, can tell you how to practice in order not to allow Hell to manifest; and when Hell is already there, what to do and what not to do so that Hell will not continue, but will be transformed into something wonderful. Joy and happiness are possible, and if we are able to learn a little bit about the practice of mindfulness, we will be able to make life much more pleasant in our family, and also in school and society.

Tomorrow I will tell you another story. This is the end of your Dharma talk, and when you hear the little bell, please stand up and bow to the Sangha before you go out to continue the Dharma discussion. The topic will be "How to Transform Hell into Heaven." Have a good day!

## (Bell)**PART II**

Dear friends, the energy that pushes us to do what we do not want to do, to say what we do not want to say, is called habit energy, the negative habit energy in us. *Vasana* is the word in Sanskrit. (Sounds of Thay writing on the board.) It is very important that we recognize that energy in us. This energy has been transmitted to us by many generations of ancestors, and we continue to cultivate it. It is very powerful. We are intelligent enough to know that if we do this, if we say that, we will cause damage in our relationship. Yet when the time comes, when we find ourselves in that situation, we say it or we do it, even though we know it will be destructive. Why? Because it's stronger than we are, we say. It is pushing us all the time. That is why the practice aims at liberating ourselves from that kind of habit energy.

I remember one day when I was sitting on the bus in India, with a friend, visiting untouchable communities. I was there to help bring Buddhist practice to our friends who belong to the Ambedkar Society. I remembered that one day in Nagpur, five hundred thousand untouchables formally received the Five Mindfulness Trainings, because they wanted to liberate themselves from their situation of being oppressed, and they needed spiritual strength, spiritual practice. But after their leader, Dr.

Ambedkar, died, the movement did not go on with energy. So I tried to come and help.

That friend of mine was sitting on my right on the bus. We went to many states in India to offer days of mindfulness and public lectures and retreats. The landscape was beautiful, with palm trees, temples, buffaloes, rice fields, and I was enjoying what I saw from my window. When I looked at him, I saw that he looked very tense, and was not enjoying it as I did. He was struggling. I said, "My dear friend, there is nothing for you to worry about now. I know that your concern is to make my trip pleasant, and to make me happy, but you know, I am happy right now, so enjoy yourself. Sit back, smile. The landscape is very beautiful." He was very tense. He said, "Okay," and he sat back. But just two minutes later, when I looked back at him, he was as tense as before. He was still struggling, struggling and struggling. He was not capable of letting go of the struggle, that struggle that has been going on for many thousands of years. He was not capable of dwelling in the present moment and touching life deeply in that moment, which was my practice, and still is my practice. He was an untouchable himself. Now he has a family, a beautiful apartment to live in, a good job, and he does not look like an untouchable, but he is still one, because he still carries all the energies, the suffering of all his ancestors in the past many thousands of years. They struggle during the day, they struggle during the night, even in dreams, and they are not capable of letting go and relaxing.

Our ancestors might have been luckier than his, but why do many of us behave very much like him? We do not allow ourselves to be relaxed, to be in the here and the now. Why do we always try to run and run, even when we are having our breakfast, even while having our lunch, while walking, while sitting? There is something pushing us, pulling us, all the time. We are not capable of being free, in order to touch life deeply in this very moment. Your depression, your illness, is an outcome of that kind of behavior, because you have never allowed yourself to be free. You make yourself busy all of your life, you believe that happiness and peace is not possible in the here and the now, that it may be possible in the future. That is why you take all of your energies in order to run there, hoping that someday in the future you will have some happiness or some peace. The Buddha addressed this issue very clearly. He said, "Don't get caught in the past, because the past is gone. Don't get upset about the future, because the future is not yet here. There is only one moment for you to be alive, and that is the present moment. Go back to the present moment and live this moment deeply, and you'll be free."

The Buddha said that living happily in the present moment is something possible: *drsta dharma sukha vihari*. *Drsta dharma* means the things that are here, that happen in the here and the now. *Sukha* means happiness. *Vihari* means to dwell, to live. Living happily in the present moment is the practice. But how to liberate ourselves in order to really be in the here and the now? Buddhist meditation offers the practice of stopping. Stopping is very important, because we have been running all our lives, and also in all our previous lives. Our ancestors, our grandfather, our grandmother, had been running, and now they continue to run in us. If we don't practice, then our children will carry us and continue to run in the future.

So we have to learn the art of stopping, *L'arret*. The Chinese word for stopping is *zhi* (sounds of writing), and if you go to China you'll see a lot of these signs on the street. It means "Stop." If you are a driver, you have to understand that. That is exactly the word used in the scriptures: stopping. Stop running, stop being pushed by that habit energy. But first of all you have to recognize that there is such an energy in yourself, that is always pushing. Even if you want to stop, it doesn't allow you to stop. At breakfast time, a number of us are capable of enjoying our breakfast, a number of us are capable of being together in the here and the now. Just yesterday I had breakfast with two novice monks. We did not have fancy things, but I looked at the two novices and I said, "It's wonderful that we are having breakfast together. It's a most wonderful thing, a most joyful thing. Do you think that there is something more wonderful than just sitting together and having our breakfast together, one teacher and two novices?" One novice offered me a broad smile. He understood. Not only did he understand my statement, but he understood the reality that happiness was real, because we were capable of being together, recognizing the true presence of each other. In that moment life was real. But many of us, while having our breakfast are not really there. We continue to run. We have a lot of projects, we have a lot of worries, we have a lot of anxieties, and we cannot sit like a Buddha.

The Buddha is always sitting on a lotus flower, very fresh, very stable. If we are capable of sitting in the here and the now, anywhere we sit becomes a lotus flower-whether that is the root of a tree, the grass, a stone bench-any of these things becomes a lotus flower for you to sit on, because you are really sitting, you are really there. Your body and your mind together, you are free from all worries, from all regrets, from all anger. Though each of us during sitting meditation has a cushion, the cushion can be Hell, the cushion can be Heaven, the cushion can be a lotus flower, the cushion can be thorns. Many of us sit on the cushion, but it's like sitting on thorns. We don't know how to enjoy the lotus flower.

A few years ago Mr. Nelson Mandela, the president of South Africa came here, for his first official visit, to meet the French president, and the press asked him what he would like to do the most. He said, "What I want to do the most is just sit down and do nothing. (Laughter.) Since my release from prison I have not had that pleasure, I always have to do something. Therefore my deepest desire is to be allowed to sit down and do nothing." In our Sangha here, there are three youngsters who came from South Africa. One of them has become a monk, and two of them are still lay practitioners. They enjoy the practice, and I usually tell them, "Please, sit for your president. If he cannot sit down, then you have to sit for him. Every day we have three occasions to sit, and if you know the need of your president, and of many people in your country, then you would like to sit for them, and sit in such a way that peace and joy become possible." Sitting is not like hard labor, sitting is the enjoyment of stability, of peace, of dwelling in the present moment. We have to recognize the habit energy every time it manifests. It always dictates our behavior, pushing us to do and say things, so we have to practice mindfulness, in order to recognize it every time it is manifested.

A young man from America came here for the summer retreat about ten years ago. He enjoyed his three weeks of practice in the Upper Hamlet, he enjoyed walking and sitting and breathing and cooking, and so on. One day we organized a ceremony called the Thanksgiving Ceremony. Because we also have our own way of celebrating thanks giving - to our parents who brought us to life, to our teachers who show us the way to live happily in the present moment, to our friends who support us in difficult moments, and to all living beings in the animal, vegetable and mineral realms. That day we practiced being aware of

their existence, and lived in such a way as to be grateful for their support.

That young man was asked by his fellow Americans to go to Ste. Foy la Grande to do some shopping, because each national group had to cook something very special from their country, in order to place it on the collective altar of ancestors. If you were a Chinese person, then you would cook something Chinese, something very special in your country. When he was in the market shopping, suddenly a kind of energy came up, and he suddenly became restless, and hurrying. He lost his peace and his beauty. During the three weeks in the Upper Hamlet he never behaved like that, because he was among his Sangha, and everyone was practicing walking and sitting and doing things in a relaxed way, learning how to live in the present moment. The practice in the Upper Hamlet was strong, and he found himself in a Sangha that was practicing well. That is why he enjoyed that kind of freedom, that kind of stability, that kind of joy. Now he was alone in the market, and suddenly he felt himself rushing, feeling restless, and trying to do things quickly in order to go home to the Upper Hamlet. But because he had already been practicing for three full weeks, he was able to recognize what was going on within himself. He had a kind of insight: he saw that that was the habit energy of his mother, because she was always like that, rushing, hurrying, agitated, restless. At the moment when he got this insight, he went back to his in-breath and his out-breath, and he said, "Hello, Mommy!" and that feeling of restlessness and hurrying just disappeared. He knew that he was not surrounded by brothers and sisters of his Sangha, and that alone in Ste. Foy la Grande he had to use his mindful breathing as his Sangha. From that moment on he continued the practice of mindful breathing, and he stayed stable and joyful and peaceful the whole time he was shopping. When he came back here he told us the story.

So that negative habit energy that pushes us may have been cultivated by us during the past many years, but it may also have been transmitted to us by our mother, or our father, or our ancestors. And that is our heritage.

(Bell)

Our joy, our peace, our happiness depend very much on our practice of recognizing and transforming our habit energies. There are positive habit energies that we have to cultivate, there are negative habit energies that we have to recognize, embrace and transform. The energy with which we do these things is mindfulness. Mindfulness is a kind of energy that helps us to be aware of what is going on. Therefore, when the habit energy shows itself, we know right away. "Hello, my little habit energy, I know you are there. I will take good care of you." In recognizing it as it is, you are in control of the situation. You don't have to fight it; in fact the Buddha does not recommend that you fight it, because that habit energy is you, and you should not fight against yourself. You have to generate the energy of mindfulness, which is also you, and that positive energy will do the work of recognizing and embracing. Every time you embrace your habit energy, you can help it to transform a little bit. The habit energy is a kind of seed within your consciousness, and when it becomes a source of energy, you have to recognize it. You have to bring your mindfulness into the present moment, and you just embrace that negative energy: "Hello, my negative habit energy. I know you are there. I am here for you." After maybe one or two or three minutes, that energy will go back into the form of a seed, in order to re-manifest itself later on. You have to be very alert.

Every time a negative energy is embraced by the energy of mindfulness, it will lose a little bit of its strength as it returns as a seed to the lower level of consciousness. The same thing is true for all other mental formations: your fear, your anguish, your anxiety, and your despair. They exist in us in the form of seeds, and every time one of the seeds is watered, it becomes a zone of energy on the upper level of our consciousness. If you don't know how to take care of it, it will cause damage, it will push us to do or to say things that will damage us and damage the people we love. Therefore, generating the energy of mindfulness, to recognize it, to embrace it, to take care of it, is the practice. And the practice should be done in a very tender, non-violent way. There should be no fighting, because when you fight, you create damage within yourself. The Buddhist practice is based on the insight of non-duality: you are love, you are mindfulness, but you are also that habit energy within you. To meditate does not mean to transform yourself into a battlefield, the right fighting the wrong, the positive fighting the negative. That's not Buddhist. That is why, based on the insight of non-duality, the practice should be non-violent. Mindfulness embracing anger is like a mother embracing her child, big sister embracing younger sister. The embrace always brings a positive effect. You can bring relief, and you can cause the negative energy to lose some of its strength, just by embracing it.

(Thay draws on the board.) This circle represents our consciousness, and the lower part is called the store consciousness. In French we usually translate this as *le trefonds*. The upper part is called the mind consciousness, usually translated as *le mental*. In the soil of the store consciousness, many kinds of seeds are stored: the seed of love, the seed of understanding, the seed of forgiveness, the seed of despair, the seed of anger-positive and negative, they are all kept and preserved in the store consciousness. And every time one of these seeds is touched or watered, it will manifest itself up here in the mind consciousness as a zone of energy, "energy number one." That maybe your fear, your jealousy, your despair, your depression.

A practitioner is someone who has the right to suffer, but who does not have the right not to practice. People who are not practitioners allow their pain, sorrow and anguish to overwhelm them, to push them to say and do things they don't want. We, who consider ourselves to be practitioners, have the right to suffer like everyone else, but we don't have the right not to practice. Therefore, we have to do something, to call on the positive things within our bodies and our consciousness, to take care of our situations. It's okay to suffer, it's okay to be angry, but it's not okay to allow yourself to be flooded with suffering. We know that in our bodies and our consciousness there are positive elements that we can call on for help. We have to mobilize these positive elements to protect ourselves and to take good care of the negative things that are manifesting in us.

What we usually do is to call on the seed of mindfulness here to come up, and manifest also as a zone of energy, which we will call "energy number two". The energy of mindfulness has the capacity of recognizing, embracing, and relieving the suffering, calming and also transforming. In every one of us the seed of mindfulness exists, but if we have not practiced the art of mindful living, then that seed may be very small. We can be mindful, but our mindfulness is rather poor. Of course, when you drive your car, you need your mindfulness. A minimum amount of mindfulness is required for your driving, otherwise you will get into an accident. We know that every one of us has the capacity of being mindful. When you operate a machine, you

need a certain amount of mindfulness, otherwise, *un accident de travail* (an industrial injury). In our relationship with another person, we also need some amount of mindfulness, otherwise we will damage the relationship. We know that all of us have some energy of mindfulness, and that is the kind of energy we need very much to take care of our pain and our sorrow.

Mindfulness is something all of us can do. When you drink some water, and you know that you are drinking water, that is mindfulness. We call it mindfulness of drinking. When you breathe in, and you are aware that you are breathing in, that is mindfulness of breathing, and when you walk, and you know that you are walking, then that is mindfulness of walking. Mindfulness of driving, mindfulness of cooking...you don't need to be in the meditation hall to practice mindfulness. You can be there in the kitchen, or in the garden, as you continue to cultivate the energy of mindfulness. That is the most important practice within a Buddhist practice center: you do everything mindfully, because you need that energy very much, for your transformation and healing. You know you can do it, and you will do it better if you are surrounded by a community of brothers and sisters who are doing the same things as you are. Alone you might forget, and you might abandon your practice after a few days or a few months. But if you live permanently with a Sangha, then you will be supported, and your mindfulness will grow stronger and stronger every day, thanks to the support of the Sangha.

For those of us who practice mindfulness as an art of daily living, the seed of mindfulness in our store consciousness becomes very strong; and any time we touch it, we call on it for help, then it will be ready for us, just like the mother who, although she is working in the kitchen, is always ready for the baby every time the baby cries. So our mindfulness is there so that we may recognize, because mindfulness is defined first of all as the energy that helps us to know what is going on in the present moment. I drink water, I know that I am drinking the water. Drinking the water is what is happening. I walk mindfully, I make steps mindfully, and I know that I am making mindful steps. Mindfulness of walking: I am aware that walking is going on, and I am concentrated in the walking. Mindfulness has the power of bringing concentration. When you drink your water mindfully, you are concentrated on your drinking. If you are concentrated, life is deep, and you can get more joy and stability just by drinking your water mindfully. You can drive mindfully, you can cut your carrots mindfully, and when you do these things mindfully, you feel that you are concentrated. You live deeply each moment of your daily life, and we all know that mindfulness and concentration will bring about the insight that we need.

If you don't stop, if you don't become mindful, if you are not concentrated, then there is no chance that you can get the insight. Buddhist meditation is to stop, to calm yourself, to be concentrated, and to direct your looking deeply into what is there in the here and now. The first element of Buddhist meditation is stopping, and the second element is looking deeply. Stopping means not to run anymore, to be mindful of what is happening in the here and the now. (Sounds of writing.) Mindfulness allows you to be in the here and the now, with body and mind united. In our daily lives, it happens very often that our body is there, but our mind is elsewhere, in the past or the future, or caught in our projects, our fear, our anger. Mindfulness helps bring the mind back to the body, and when you do that you suddenly become truly present in the here and the now. So you can define mindfulness as the energy that helps you to be fully present. If you are fully present, with your mind and body truly together, you suddenly become fully present and fully alive. It is that energy that helps you to be alive and present. You can bring mindfulness to yourself in many ways: by just breathing, by walking, by looking, by cooking, by breakfast-making...because you can use breakfast-making as an exercise to bring body and mind together.

I'd like to define mindfulness as the practice of being there, body and mind united. The practice of being fully present, the practice of being fully alive. You have an appointment with life-you should not miss it. The time and the space of your appointment is the here and the now. If you miss the present moment, if you miss the here and the now, you miss your appointment with life, which is very serious. So learning how to go back to the present moment, to be fully present, to be fully alive, is the beginning of meditation. Since you are there, something else is there also: life. If you are not available to life, then life will not be available to you. When you stand there with a group of people, contemplating the rising moon, you need to be mindful, you need to be in the here and the now. If you allow yourself to get lost in the past or the future, the full moon is not for you, it is for other people who are there. So if you know how to practice mindful breathing, you can bring your mind back to your body, and you can make yourself fully present and fully alive, now the moon will be for you. That is why I said that if you were there, something else would be there also: life.

Mindfulness helps your stopping to be realized. You stop running because you are really there. You stop being carried by your habit energy, by your forgetfulness. And when you touch something beautiful, with mindfulness, that something becomes a refreshing and healing element for you. With mindfulness we can touch the positive things, and we can also touch the negative things. If there is joy, mindfulness allows us to recognize it as joy, and mindfulness helps us to profit from that joy and allows it to grow, and to help us in the work of transformation and healing.

There are elements within us that have not gone wrong. There are elements around us that have not gone wrong. And the first task of meditators is to be able to touch and to recognize these positive elements, because they have the power of nourishing and healing. If you are a psychotherapist, you might like to try this with your clients: instead of talking about what goes wrong, you begin to invite him or her about what does not go wrong with you and around you. Sometimes we are too weak and too sick to embrace only our negative elements. Before a surgery is done, a doctor will examine the patient to see whether that person has enough strength to withstand the surgery. If the person is too weak, the doctor will try, through nutrition and other means, to help the patient's body to strengthen before the operation is done. We do the same thing here. If that person suffers so much, we should not begin by talking about what is wrong.

Our body and our consciousness is like a garden: there may be a number of trees dying in that garden, but that does not mean that the whole garden is dead. Maybe the majority of the trees are still vigorous, beautiful. That is why you should not allow the negative to overwhelm us, because there are still many things that work well within our bodies and our consciousness. The therapist should help his or her client to develop the ability to identify these positive elements within him or her, and around him or her. And the therapist, of course, has to be able to do that for himself or herself, and become a co-practitioner. The

therapist can invite his client for a walking meditation session, and during that session, he will try to put his client in touch with the positive elements within him or around him. In the Buddhist practice this is very important. Mindfulness is the energy we generate, and first of all we want that energy to help us get in touch with the positive things-joy and happiness.

Last week we studied the discourse on the sixteen exercises of mindful breathing, the *Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*, and we saw very clearly that the Buddha was very compassionate. Among the sixteen exercises of mindful breathing, six of them have the purpose of helping us to contact the positive aspects of life within and around us. That is why meditation can be described as food, nourishment for us. Mindfulness is the kind of energy you cultivate with the practice of walking, breathing, sitting, eating, cooking, and so on. We should not waste a minute in our daily lives. We can use every moment of our daily lives to generate more energy of mindfulness.

In Plum Village, when you go to the kitchen, you will see that people in the kitchen are practicing. That group of people knows that today is their turn to cook for the community, and they know that it is possible to make the cooking for the community into a practice, and the motivation is love, the motivation is the willingness to practice. We can begin before starting the work of cooking, they always offer incense, and they do some chanting, so that they will remember that the whole process of cooking is a practice. They don't talk. From time to time they have to communicate in order to coordinate the work, but they do it mindfully.

From time to time I will go to the kitchen, and if I see a monk or a nun or a layperson doing something like cutting carrots, I will stop by and contemplate, and look. I will stay there for a number of seconds, breathing in and breathing out, and my presence close to that person is sometimes very helpful. That person might be losing himself in thinking, but with me standing there, then he will come back to his mindful carrot cutting very quickly. Sometimes I may ask, "My dear friend, what are you doing there?" Usually the monk or the nun or the layperson will look up at me and smile, and that is enough. Because they know that my presence and my question does not necessitate an answer. And if you were to say, "Thay, I am cutting carrots," that would be the worst answer, because I am there, and I see you cutting carrots. You don't have to tell me. My question is, "Are you enjoying it as a practice?" That is why you can answer like this, "Thay, I am doing nothing," or "Thay, I am breathing," or you don't say anything at all and you smile. So the presence of a Dharma brother, the presence of a Dharma sister, is to help you to go back to the here and the now and to enjoy your practice of being mindful. Cutting carrots may be very joyful, breathing also, walking also. While you do these things, you realize stopping. You don't run any more, you are with whatever is there in the present moment. You are wholeheartedly with the carrot.

(Bell)

We should invest one hundred percent of ourselves into the business of carrot cutting. Nothing else. You have to cut the carrot with all of yourself. While cutting the carrot please don't try to think of the Dharma talk, just cut the carrot in the best way that you can, becoming one with the carrot, becoming one with the cutting. Live deeply that moment of carrot cutting. It is as important as the practice of sitting meditation. It is as important as giving a Dharma talk. When you cut the carrot, just cut the carrot with all your being. That is mindfulness. That is to produce your true presence to become fully alive. The practice is not difficult, especially when you are surrounded by a Sangha where everyone is doing the same. You are cutting carrots, he is sweeping the ground in the meditation hall-you are both practicing the same thing. If you can cultivate concentration, and if you can get the insight you need to liberate yourself from suffering, that is because you know how to cut your carrots.

Cleaning the toilet, you have to do it in the same spirit: invest all of yourself into the cleaning, make it into a joyful practice. One thing at a time, do it deeply. The purpose of the practice is to cultivate the energy of mindfulness. The energy of mindfulness will help us to live each moment of our lives deeply, help us stop running, help us touch what is wonderful, refreshing, nourishing and healing in us and around us. There are many wonders of life that are available in the here and the now, and without mindfulness we would neglect them, we would ignore them, we would not know how to profit from them. It is like my eyes. Breathing in, I am aware of my eyes; breathing out, I smile to my eyes. That is an exercise: mindfulness of eyes, smiling to eyes. When you embrace your eyes with your mindfulness you recognize that you have eyes, still in good condition. It is a wonderful thing still to have eyes in good condition. You need only to open them to enter the Paradise of colors and forms. Those of us who have lost our eyesight know what it feels like to live in the dark, and our greatest desire is for someone to be able to restore our capacity to see things. I have lost my Paradise of forms and colors because I have become blind. Now you give me back my eyesight, I feel as though I am in Paradise again, the Paradise of forms and colors. Sit on the grass and just open your eyes. The blue sky is for you. The white clouds are for you, the trees, the children, the grass, and the loving face of your beloved one. Everything is available to you because you have eyes still in good condition. Most of us don't appreciate our eyes because we are not mindful. We may think that everything in us goes wrong, but that is not true. There are millions of things in us that have not gone wrong, yet we only place our attention on what goes wrong. That is not wisdom. Touching the positive is important, and if you cannot do it by yourself, because your practice is not strong yet, then rely on the brothers and sisters to help you do so; or the therapist, like the teacher, can help you to do this. But the therapist, like the teacher, has to be able to do it for herself, for himself, first, in order to be able to help another person to do so.

The orange is sweet. If you eat the orange in forgetfulness, being caught in your anxiety and sorrow, the orange is not really there. But if you bring your mind and body back together, produce your true presence, become fully alive, and begin to peel the orange, you will see that the orange is a miracle. The orange is not something less than a miracle. If mindfulness is there, then sitting there peeling an orange is a wonderful thing. I have conducted orange meditation sessions where we spent half an hour just eating an orange. And if you can bring the elements of stability and freedom and concentration into it, then eating an orange is a very wonderful thing to do. It may be the most important thing to do with your life. Like eating breakfast with your disciples. Peel the orange. Smell it. Look at the orange to see the orange blossoms, and the rain and the sun that have gone through the orange blossoms. The orange tree has taken several months to bring this wonder to you. If you don't have mindfulness, the orange is not something precious; you are not there, really there, so the orange is not really there. When you



are truly there, fully alive, you will become a miracle yourself. In fact, you are no less than a miracle. To be alive, to be still alive, and to be there, is the greatest miracle. But without mindfulness we cannot touch that miracle, and we continue to complain and to complain. If you are there, the orange will be there too, as a miracle, and the contact between you and the orange brings true life. Just put a section of the orange into your mouth, close your mouth mindfully, and with mindfulness feel the juice coming out of the orange. Do you have the time to do so? What are you using your time for? Are we using our time to live, or to worry, or to make plans?

So mindfulness is the energy that helps us to be really there, to touch the wonders of life that are there, for our own nourishment and healing. Of course, there are negative things within in us and around the world. Mindfulness will help us to recognize them as existing, and, embrace them, bringing them some relief. If you continue to look deeply into the nature of your pain, of the pain of the world, insight will come about how that pain has come to be. Insight always liberates us, and there will be no insight if there is no mindfulness and concentration. So mindfulness produces your true presence, produces life, and helps us with nourishment and healing. Mindfulness helps bring relief. Every time we embrace our pain and our sorrow with our mindfulness, we can always bring relief to ourselves.

When the "energy number two" embraces the "energy number one," it begins to penetrate it. With the continued practice of mindful breathing or mindful walking, the energy of mindfulness continues to be there to embrace and take care of the energy of anger or distress. When you cook potatoes, you have to keep the fire under the pot alive for about twenty minutes. The same thing is true with the practice of embracing our pain and anger. You know that the energy of pain and anger need to be attended to, and so mindfulness should continue to be generated as an energy. In a practice center you learn how to maintain that energy alive; continued mindful breathing and continued mindful breathing are among the practices that keep mindfulness alive. With that energy you can continue to embrace your pain and sorrow. It may be that after ten or fifteen minutes your pain and sorrow will go back to your store consciousness a little bit weaker, your habit energy will go back to the store consciousness as a seed, a little bit weaker. The next time it manifests itself again, you will do the same kind of practice, always embracing and looking deeply into it. You don't need to fight it.

### **Part III**

With our mindfulness we can make things more beautiful. If you are really there, fully present, then the wonders of life will reveal more of themselves to you. The more you are mindful, the more you are concentrated, the wonders of life will continue to unfold, to reveal themselves to you. The enjoyment you have will grow. That beautiful sunrise, that full moon, that orange, all these things will reveal themselves to you fully if you are truly present, if you are truly alive. That is for your nourishment and healing. As for the negative elements, you don't have to know the nature of your pain, your conflict yet. You don't have to do that in the beginning. You only have to recognize the existence of the pain, the sorrow and the conflict in you. You identify it as the pain, the anger, the sorrow, the conflict, and just produce the energy of mindfulness and embrace it. Stay with it, attend to it with all of your tenderness, your kindness, and take good care of your suffering. Don't try to run away. You run a way because you are too afraid. You are too afraid because you have nothing to protect you and to help you. If you know how to enjoy your practice of mindful walking, mindful breathing, mindful tea drinking, then the energy of mindfulness in you is strong enough for you to embrace and recognize that pain and that sorrow. You also have your Sangha, the brothers and sisters in the Dharma are always there to support you. The collective energy of mindfulness is what we experience when we become part of a practicing Sangha. If you know that during the time of your suffering, you already have a friend capable of understanding, a friend who has some solidity and freedom sitting close to you, you will feel much better. You will feel as though you can stand your suffering, you can look at it, you can embrace it, because your friend's energy, his stability, his freedom are elements that can help you to be a little bit more stable, freer, so that you can embrace your own pain. That is why the existence of practitioners close to you is a very important element.

During the first week of our Summer Retreat, I emphasized the fact that we have to create a place where what you touch can be positive, supportive of your practice. You have to create a Sangha also. A Sangha is a community where many people know how to live deeply in the present moment, there are people who know how to smile, how to enjoy walking and sitting, and if you bring yourself to that environment you will feel better right away. You are initiated into the practice, you are supported by the practice of other people, and very soon you can see the process of nourishment and healing begin. I said that the therapist should be an architect, someone who can create an environment for continued practice. Sometimes you can help that person to suffer less, but if you put him or her back in his or her environment, the same thing will happen again and again. That is why creating a Sangha, a space where you can be nourished, where you can be supported for a long time, is very important.

In the Buddhist practice, a good teacher is always a teacher that has a Sangha. A teacher without a Sangha cannot do much. And the Buddha had a good Sangha. He was an excellent Sangha builder. The king of Kosala told the Buddha that every time he saw the Sangha, he had confidence in the Buddha. So the Sangha is a part of the teaching and the practice. It is thanks to the Sangha that transformation and healing become possible. I think that in therapeutic circles, the doctors and the therapists also need a sane and healthy space, and a Sangha of people who are capable of being happy, of enjoying mental health, physical health, so that the person brought into that environment can feel safe, and can feel the process of healing and transformation taking place right away. So the therapist also needs a Sangha, and an environment without that environment and Sangha, he or she cannot go very far.

I would like to offer you an exercise of mindful walking. It is very important. You practice stopping while you are walking. If you are capable of stopping during the time of walking, then you will be able to stop during the time of breakfast eating, toilet cleaning, or breakfast making. Your depression, for instance, will not go away, until you know how to stop. You have lived in such a way that depression has been possible. You have been running all the time, and you have never allowed yourself to rest, to relax, and to go deeply into your daily life. That is why the depression has come to be. Learning how to walk is what you can do now. You can do it in Plum Village, and when you go home, arrange things so that you can do it every day.

Walking in walking meditation is walking just to enjoy walking. You don't have any desire to arrive anywhere. Walking and not arriving, that is the technique. And you enjoy every step you make. Every step brings you home to the here and the now. Your true home according to this teaching is the here and the now, because only in this moment, in this place, called the here and the now, can life be possible. The address of the Buddhas and the bodhisattvas, and the Zip Code, is "here and now." (Laughter.) The address of peace and light is also "here and now." You know where to go; and every in-breath, every out-breath, every step you make should bring you back to that address.

Taking one in-breath, taking one out-breath, you make two steps, two beautiful steps, and with every step you say, "I have arrived." That should not be a statement, that should be a practice. You have to arrive in the here and the now, and make a strong determination to stop and not to run anymore. You have run all your life already, now is the chance to stop. You walk in a way that can introduce you to the Pure Land of Buddha right away, that can introduce you to the Kingdom of God right away. The Pure Land is the Land where you don't feel the need to run anymore...and with one step you can enter it. Also the Kingdom of God is the kingdom of peace, and when you arrive in the Kingdom of God you don't feel you have to run anymore, if you feel that you need to run more, then you are not there yet. That is why with one in-breath you practice: "I have arrived, I have arrived" ...and please don't just make the statement, you have to really arrive. Allow yourself to sink deeply into the here and the now, because life is possible only in the present, life is available only in the present moment, and you know that you have the capacity to touch life in the present moment, the here and the now. It is wonderful that you are still alive, it's wonderful that you are making steps on this beautiful planet, but our daily life does not allow us to touch that at all. It is like the orange, it is like the beautiful sunset, but we do not allow ourselves to be touched by life with all its miracles. So every step you make is to arrive in the here and the now, your true home is here and now, and everywhere you make a step, you find your true home ... "I have arrived, I have arrived," and then make two more steps, "I am home, I am home. I have arrived, I have arrived, I am home, I am home."

We have lost our freedom. We have lost our sovereignty. We are not free anymore. We allow ourselves to be pushed and pulled away from the here and the now. Now we have to resist, we have to recover our sovereignty, we have to reclaim our freedom, and we have to walk like a free person on earth. Freedom here is not political freedom, it is freedom from the past, from the future, from our worries and our fear. Be free, and each step like that can help us, can free us. And the Sangha is there, surrounding you and supporting you in making the step. Many of us here are capable of walking like that. Many of us have been trained for five years, seven years, ten years, in order to be able to walk like that. We resist, we don't allow ourselves to be carried away anymore. We want to be free, because we know that without freedom, no happiness, no peace, will be possible.

Invest one hundred percent of yourself into making that step: "I have arrived. I have arrived." And your foot will become the foot of the Buddha, because the Buddha always walked like that. And by touching the earth with your foot, you produce the miracle of being alive. You make yourself real and the earth real, and such a step is highly nourishing and healing. You are protecting yourself from the habit energy that is always pushing you to run and to get lost. *Je suis chez moi. Je suis arrivée.* The practice should be very strong, determined. Bring all your attention down to the soles of your feet. Don't stay over here, bring all your attention to the soles of your feet, and touch the earth as though you kiss the earth with your feet. Like the seal of an emperor on a decree, walk as though you imprint your solidity, your freedom, and your peace on the earth. When I look at your footprint I can see the mark of solidity, of freedom, in it. We have to reclaim our liberty. Liberty, emancipation, *Vimukti*, that is the practice to free ourselves from that negative habit energy.

I have arrived, I am home. This is already an insight. Make the Buddha's insight into your own insight. It is not an intellectual concept. But you are awake; you get the enlightenment that life is available only in the here and the now. That is why you have made a strong determination to go home. Your true home is in the here and the now. Only that insight can help you to stop running. You practice arriving with every step you make. "I have arrived; I am home." If your freedom is not perfect, if your stability is not perfect, if you are still pulled back and forth by that habit energy, then look at the brothers who are walking in front of you. Feel that the sisters are walking behind you, and on your right a sister, on your left a sister, all of them doing the same thing: bringing the Pure Land, bringing the Kingdom of God into the here and the now, and you will profit from the collective energy of the Sangha. Back home you cannot profit from that, and here there is an opportunity to allow ourselves to be carried by the boat of the Sangha, to be penetrated by the energy of the Sangha, so that we can make the step. And of course we can make it.

"I have arrived, I am home." Repeat breathing in and out and making steps until you are firmly established in the here and the now, recognizing that this is your true home, until you get the feeling that it is wonderful to be in the here and the now. To allow ourselves to run as before would not be wise at all. Then you will use the next sentence, "In the here, in the now." In fact it is the same thing. Different words, but the same thing. That home is called here and now. When you breathe in, "I am in the here, in the here." And breathing out, "In the now, in the now." Again, the words should not be an obstacle, the words should only help you concentrate and to keep your insight alive. It is the insight that keeps you home, not the words. So please don't be satisfied with words. It is like the bell: everyone hears the bell, but for a number of us, when we hear the bell we hear the voice that is deep within ourselves; and when we hear that bell, we make peace, stopping, joy and freedom possible. The words are like the sound of the bell; they should be able to produce the insight, the stability and the freedom that we need so much.

You may like to enjoy "I have arrived, I am home," for a few minutes, and when you think that you are good at it, you may move to the next line, "In the here, in the now." And then: "I am solid, I am free." This is not autosuggestion; if you have succeeded in arriving at home, dwelling really in the here and the now, you already have the elements of solidity and freedom, which are the foundation of your happiness. The Buddha said that the two characteristics of Nirvana are solidity and freedom. Imagine someone who has no solidity, no freedom. That person can never be happy. So walking like that is to cultivate freedom and solidity, which will bring us well being and happiness.

The last is: "In the Ultimate, I dwell." This sentence requires a little bit of explanation. You have heard, of course, of the two dimensions of reality, the Ultimate dimension and the historical dimension. To represent the two dimensions of reality, we may use the images of the wave, and water. Looking at the dimension of the wave, the historical dimension, we see that the wave seems to have a beginning and an end; the wave can be high or low compared to other waves; the wave might be more or less beautiful than the other waves; the wave might be there or not there; it might be there now, but later not there. All these notions are there when we first touch the historical dimension: birth and death, being and non-being, high and low, coming and going, and so on. But we know that when we touch the wave more deeply, we will touch the water. The water is the other dimension of the wave. It is called the Ultimate dimension.

We know that in the historical dimension we can talk in terms of life, death, being, non-being, high, low, coming, going, but in the Ultimate dimension, all these notions are removed. If the wave is capable of touching the water within herself, and if the wave can live the life of water at the same time, then she will not be afraid of all these notions: beginning and ending, birth and death, being or non-being; and she will get the solidity and joy brought to her by non-fear. Her true nature is the nature of no-birth and no-death, no beginning and no end. That is the nature of water. All of us are like that wave. We have our historical dimension. We believe that we begin to be at a certain point of time, and that we will cease to be at a certain point of time. We believe that we are now existing, and that before our birth we did not exist. All these kinds of notions, we get caught into these notions, and that is why we have fear, we have jealousy, we have craving, we have all these kinds of conflicts and afflictions within us. Now if we are capable of arriving, of being more solid and free, it will be possible for us to touch our true nature, the Ultimate dimension of ourselves. In touching that Ultimate dimension, we really get free from all these notions that have made us suffer a lot. This will be made clearer later on. For the time being just enjoy making steps with these two words.

#### **Part IV**

In the French version of the poem, we have something different: *«Je prends refuge en moi-meme. Dans la Terre Pure, je m'etablis.»* We can translate this into English as: "I take refuge within myself. In the Pure Land I dwell." If you walk like this, you are already in the Pure Land; you are already in the Kingdom of God. I have been in crowds of two or three thousand people practicing walking meditation together. It is very powerful. Everybody just makes one step, wholly concentrated. It is wonderful: the energy is very powerful. During the time of walking, we don't think of anything, we don't speak, we just touch the earth mindfully and deeply. There are those of us who don't need these words in order to be able to concentrate, but it is very helpful to make use of these words in the beginning of the practice. They help us to be concentrated, to be in the here and the now.

It is good to begin your practice of walking meditation with the Sangha, to get the support. Please arrange it so that during your day you have many chances to do it alone. You can ask a friend to go with you, or you can even take the hand of a child and walk with him or her. In Plum Village many of us begin by signing a contract with a staircase: that is, you make a vow that you will always go up or down that staircase very mindfully, with very solid steps. If it happens that halfway up you realize that one of your steps has not been very solid, you will go down, and begin again. And if you succeed in that, then wherever you go you will be able to dwell in the present moment. You can sign a contract with a particular distance separating your tent and a certain tree, perhaps three or four meters, and you make a vow that when you walk that distance that every step will be solid and mindful, otherwise you will go back and do it again. It is a wonderful way to learn how to live every moment of your daily life deeply, resisting being carried away by your habit energy. Let us try, now, after the Dharma talk, walking together in that spirit. Use your feet to walk, don't use your brain. Use your feet and walk. Walk in such a way as to make the Pure Land available here and now. Walk in such a way that joy and life are possible right here and right now.

(Three bells)

(End of Dharma talk)

# Walking into the Kingdom of God

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Good morning, my dear friends.

Today is August 6, 1997, and we are in the Upper Hamlet of Plum Village. This morning in Hiroshima, a few hours ago, 30,000 people gathered in the Hiroshima Park. They meditated together. The Prime Minister of Japan was there this morning, and in his speech, he demanded that all atomic bombs be destroyed. Thirty thousand Japanese gathered today to commemorate the 52nd anniversary of the first atomic bomb, the bomb that fell on Hiroshima exactly on the sixth of August. It was a small bomb, but it was a new kind of bomb that had the power of killing a lot of people. At that time in 1945, the United States of America was the only country that possessed atomic bombs. Japan and Germany were associated closely with each other. The first atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima killed 140,000 people right away. In less than 30 seconds, more than 140,000 people. Not many countries on earth have atomic bombs, but the bombs they have now are a thousand times more powerful. The atomic bombs of today can destroy a whole city of Paris, of New York. They can kill millions of people in just 20 seconds. The little bomb in Hiroshima only killed 140,000 people, but after that, the Japanese who were in Hiroshima, if they did not die right away, continued to die until several decades later. I was there. I met with these people who were dying, several years after the bomb was dropped in Hiroshima. On the eighth of August, two days later, another bomb was dropped in Nagasaki and the destruction was equivalent and Japan surrendered. If you visit the Hiroshima Park today, you will come to a place where there is a little arch and inside, if you look carefully, you will see an inscription in Japanese. The inscription said, "Please lie still. We shall not do it again. Please be still there. We promise that we will not do it again." We promised not to do it again, but we have manufactured so many other bombs and nuclear warheads. Now, not only the United States of America has them, but France has them, Great Britain, India, China and many other countries. We, mankind, have the power to destroy humanity, to destroy the earth. That is why the Prime Minister of Japan this morning called on all the other nations to abolish the nuclear bombs and warheads.

The Upper Hamlet, where we sit now, was also a site of fighting between the Germans and the French during that time. Several French Resistance members

were placed against the wall that is close to the Listening to the Rain Veranda and shot by German soldiers. The inhabitants of Thenac, including used to think about their village, which now includes the Upper Hamlet of Plum Village, with that kind of horror, sadness, anger, within them.

Plum Village was set up fifteen years ago. This year is the 15th anniversary of Plum Village. And during these fifteen years, we have practiced the walking meditation, touching the soil of the Upper Hamlet with love, concentration, understanding and reconciliation. Among us there are many German friends. The German people have come here to Plum Village. They did not bring any guns; in fact, they brought their hearts, and together, with French people, with Dutch people, with American people, with British people, with Vietnamese people, we have practiced walking meditation in the Upper Hamlet every day, every night.

We have kissed the earth of the Upper Hamlet, we have kissed the soil of the Upper Hamlet with our feet, mindfully. We want to print our peace, our compassion and our love on this piece of land. And there has been a great transformation here. The inhabitants of the village of Thenac have told us that they could feel that peace radiating from Plum Village, and now every time they think of Thenac, of the Upper Hamlet, they no longer have the feeling of horror, resentment and anger. Thanks to you all who come from more than twenty countries, who have come and practiced peace, practiced forgiveness, practiced reconciliation, Thenac has become a land of peace. And Thenac will continue to offer itself as a land of peace, a place where we can come together, hold each other's hand and walk together in peace. There are times when there are retreats when many hundreds of people gather and practice, but there are times when there are only permanent residents of Plum Village who are there to practice. We are about 100 people, but we do practice every day, every night. We do bring our peace and joy and reconciliation and compassion to the land of Thenac every day and every night.

In the last fifteen years, French people have come here to practice and also German people. They have come, they have taught each other, they have practiced sitting, walking, drinking tea together, beginning anew with each other. It is a very beautiful and meaningful act. Also, we have Japanese who have come all the way from Japan to practice here. There were times when we had more than twenty Japanese people practicing with us here. We had to have the dharma talk translated into Japanese. I myself had tea meditation with only Japanese practitioners in my hut.

Today we I have the privilege of having one Japanese citizen who is here. She was born in 1958, thirteen years after the Hiroshima war event. She had heard of it and she suffered also, like the rest of us. Today we have Americans with us-- Americans who were born in 1943, '47, '48. It is wonderful that Japanese and Americans come to Plum Village and practice. Japan and America have been working together in many areas, especially economics. I don't know whether true reconciliation has been made, at a deeper level.

If we have learned from the lesson, then, Japanese and Americans will be able to keep the promise not to do it again, to themselves and to other people on earth. If Germans and French have learned that lesson, we should be able not to do it again to ourselves and to each other. Again, France and Germany are very closely associated in the enterprise of Europe, but deep inside, I don't know whether true reconciliation has been made. That is why today I beg all of you to look deeply, to go very deep to touch the wound that is still in there. To smile at it, to take each other's hand and we represent our people. The Japanese friend here will represent the Japanese people. The American who sits near to me, she will represent the American people. Both of you look deeply into the most profound level of your heart, touch the wounds, the wounds of your ancestors, your own wounds, and maybe the wounds of your children and their children, if you don't practice and heal the wound today. We shall ask the lady who represents Japan and the lady who represents America to do hugging meditation for us. All of us are Japanese; all of us are Americans, and we should be able to reconcile and heal the deep wounds in us.

I think I would like to invite one Vietnamese to come up, also, and do hugging meditation with one American. Vietnam and America have been destroying each other to a very deep level, although now there is an embassy of America in Hanoi, but that does not mean that we have been reconciled. The wound is still there very deep in the country and in the hearts of the people, both American and Vietnamese. So, we shall ask one Vietnamese person to do hugging meditation with one American person, touching deeply that wound and breathe in, breathe out deeply for all of us to heal the wounds. Then we will ask a French person representing the French people, and one German person representing the German people; they have been doing business with each other very well, but deep in their hearts, the wounds are still there.

I know of a person who survived a bomb dropped close to his house. He told me that he will never forgive the Germans. No matter what I taught him, he still cannot release his anger. I did not have a chance to be with him a lot, so I could not teach him and help him transform his hate. So this is an occasion for us to learn on this sixth of August, how to look deeply, how to embrace each other,

how to forgive each other. If we are not able to heal the wounds within us, we will transmit the wounds to future generations and they will continue to suffer like we have.

We shall ask the monks and the nuns to invoke the names of the Buddha and of the Bodhisattvas to pray for the 140,000 Japanese, to pray for all the French people and all the German people who were killed in the war, and to pray for millions of people who have died in the war in Vietnam, including children.

Now I would like you all to join your palms. I will light a stick of incense for the 140,000 Japanese who died in the bomb. And I will ask the sisters and the brothers to invoke the name of Shakyamuni Buddha, Avalokitesvara, Manjushri, and Samantabhadra. Let us listen to the bell.

[Bell]

[Thay leads chant paying homage to the bodhisattvas.]

[Bell]

Now, I would like to ask our Japanese sister and our American sister to come up here and practice hugging meditation. I will tell you how to do it. You join your palms. You breathe in and breathe out three times in order to be really there, and you open your arms. When you take the other person within your arms, you breathe in and you say, "In the name of the American people and nation," then you breathe out and you say, "We promise not to do it again." "In the name of the Japanese people, we promise not to do it again; we promise not to hold any anger." And we do that three times while everyone joins their palms and breathe in and breathe out and support them in their practice.

Breathing in, in the name of the American people, or the German People, or the Dutch people, or the Vietnamese people, because we are all responsible for what happened to some extent. When we breathe out, we say, "We promise never to do it again."

We have been learning about the six Paramitas. The Six Practices in order to cross over to the other shore, the shore of well being, the shore of non-fear, the shore of solidity, the shore of freedom. As we do not enjoy to be on this shore, the shore of anxiety and sorrow, anger, that is why we want to cross to the other shore. The teaching of the Six Paramitas have been presented to us as a means to cross to the other shore. We have learned about the practice of *Dana* Paramita, giving. We have learned about the practice of *Prajna* Paramita, understanding.

We have learned the practice of *Sila* Paramita, Mindfulness Training. We have learned the methods of *Dhayana* Paramita, the practice of meditation, of coming and looking deeply. And during this week we will learn about the last two Paramitas, namely, *ksanti* and *vira*.

Today I would like to begin with the practice of arriving. It can be said that the practice of Plum Village is the practice of arriving. Because we have been practicing running all the time, and we have not arrived. Coming to Plum Village you have to arrive. Otherwise we will run for all our life and their children will continue to run for all their lives, and several generations will continue to run and never find our true home. How to practice in order to arrive and to feel at home, that is the point. While you are in Plum Village, you are invited to practice the Bell of Mindfulness. Every time we hear the bell ringing, even the bell hanging on the Walnut tree or the one in the Medicine Hall or the Church bell nearby, we are invited to stop. To stop thinking, to stop talking, and to go back to our in-breath and our breath. All of us have been severed from our home. Unless you arrive, you cannot be happy, you cannot rest. Not only the Jewish people have been wandering around for many thousands of years, looking for a home, but all of us have been wandering for so many thousands of years looking for a place where we can feel completely at home. Many of us have not found it. A number of us in this community, a very few, have found it, and they have peace. They have happiness, they have solidity. So we can say that the practice in Plum Village is the practice of arriving. If you have not arrived, if you have been running a lot, if you have been very tired, it is time for you to try the practice of arriving. When you hear the bell, stop running. Because we continue to run in our daily life, even when we sleep. We run sometime not with our feet, but we run inside. You never get rest.

The Buddha said our mind is a monkey, monkey mind. Always on the move, never stopping. Monkey mind. Always searching, never finding. We have to know how to embrace the monkey and to teach it to rest. In Plum Village you are offered techniques, methods in order to embrace the monkey within, so you have the chance to arrive. When you hear the bell, you stop talking, you stop thinking, you stop doing the things you are doing, you break in and go back to yourself by means of your breathing. Your in breath is a vehicle. And you ride on that vehicle in order to go home. You listen intently to the sound of the bell, like the only sound in the world, like the voice of someone calling you deep, deep from within yourself. Your most beloved one is calling you. Your mother, your father, your ancestors, the Buddha, Jesus, Moses. The voice of the most beloved one, the voice of home is calling you. And you just stop everything and listen to the bell, any kind of bell. Even if you don't have a bell, you listen to the sound of the telephone. It can be any bell.



In Plum Village every time we hear the telephone we practice the same; we stop talking, we stop thinking, we listen to the telephone and we go back to ourselves by the transportation of our in-breath. Then you pronounce the words within you, "I listen, I listen." And you listen intently to the sound of the bell, like you listen to the voice of your most beloved one that you have lost trace for many thousands of years. Now he is calling, she is calling. In the Buddhist tradition they consider the sound of the bell the voice of the Buddha calling you back to your true home. That's why when you hear the bell, you breath in, listen, I am listening. When you breath out you say, "This wonderful sound brings me back to my true home." And you do that at least three times. If you like it, why don't you continue.

If you are a beginner, you may get irritated when you hear the sound of the bell, because the bell compels you to stop. You are telling your friend a very interesting story and suddenly the bell rings and it does not allow you to continue. In Plum Village you are supposed to stop, nothing is more important than the voice of your most beloved one calling you. If you are a beginner you may revolt against the bell. But if you practice well, in just two seconds you begin to enjoy breathing in and breathing out. Everyone who practices listening to the bell will have that kind of experience. So please, every time you hear the bell, stop whatever you are saying no matter how important it is. Even if you are giving a Dharma Talk. Even if you are telling another person a very important thing. Stop and listen. Listen to yourself, listen to the Buddha within. Listen to God. Listen to Jesus within. Listen to your ancestors calling you. You have been a wanderer for such a long time. You begin to enjoy breathing in and breathing out and go back to your true home.

There is an island, very safe, very green, where you can find lots of beautiful trees and streams of fresh water and birds, you can take refuge in that beautiful island. If you look deeply there must be love at once right there inside of that island. The Buddha land is in there; the kingdom of God is in there; your mother is there; your sister is there; Jesus is there; the Buddha is there. The island is called the Island of Self. The Buddhist expression is Self Island. It is inside you, available. You have been running; you have been searching. You think that your home is out there in space or in time, but in fact, your home is within and you have the capacity of touching it. Learn to listen to the bell. Learn to listen to the telephone, to the clock playing every quarter of the hour. In Plum Village, all of us practice listening to the bell, enjoy breathing in, breathing out, and go back to that beautiful island that is within us.

When you are away for several months, you long to go home. You get tired of traveling, especially after the airplane, you have to take the train, and after the train, bus, and sometimes you have to wait in Ste. Foy La Grande for hours. So, in you there is a desire, "Well, in just ten days, I'll be home."

And when you come home, you are so happy: home, sweet home. Yes, there is a kitchen in there, you can do whatever you want. You can cook anything you want. There is a bed, you can lie on it. There is a TV, you can turn it on at any time. But after a few days being at home you get bored, especially the young people, they want to go again. So, what you call home is not true home yet, because if it is true home then you feel completely satisfied, you feel safe, you feel happy, you feel love, you feel embraced. But why do you feel so restless once you are home? Some voice is calling you to leave home again, to go somewhere, and we are looking for our true home. In fact we are looking for our self. We are looking for our true self, and our true self is our true home. So, the verse concerning the bell can be, "Listen, listen. This wonderful sound brings me back to my true self."

There are people who prefer true home. To meet the true self is true home. What you call a self may not be a true self. A true self is not like that; is not miserable like that; is not in disorder like that. A true self does not possess worries and war and conflicts like that. A true self must be a true home.

We have the impression that we have lost our true home and that is true. Many poets believe that they have been exiled on earth. They have to undergo that term of exile and suffer quite a lot before they can be brought home again. Poets in the West and poets in the East also, in Asia, they always feel that they are an angel, they are a spirit that has been exiled, and they long for the moment when they can go home.

In fact, each of us has spent time in a place where we felt very safe. No worries at all. All of us have had that experience, to be in a place where there were no worries. You don't have to clean up your breakfast, your lunch, your dinner. You don't have to think about your clothes. Everything is taken care of just like in the kingdom of God. God has taken care of everything. You do not have to worry about anything. You long to go back to that space, because you have had that experience, and that experience you can touch.

The palace where you stay during that time, in Chinese they call it the palace of the child. You have been that child, in the womb of your mother. You have spent nine months in that palace and totally safe. You did not have to worry about your breakfast, your lunch, your dinner. You didn't have to worry about the

heating system. Your mother drank for you, ate for you, breathed for you, did everything for you. And that is why that experience is still alive. You long to go back to that state of no worries. You don't have to think. How wonderful. And that is why in every one of us there is feeling that I have been there, and I have lost it. Now I suffer so much and I want to go back to it. But it is impossible for us to go back to the womb of our mother. Shall we be in exile forever? Is there any hope that we can go back to that state of safety and comfort and no worries, no fear? The answer is yes!

Your true home is always there. If you know how to handle the monkey within yourself, how to stop running. Each of us is like a hungry ghost. We are hungry for love, we are hungry for understanding. We are hungry for stability, for freedom, and that is why we have been running all the time. We have not had a chance to stop and rest. That is why the practice of meditation is first of all the practice of stopping and resting in order to go back to your true home. That is the real meaning of *samatha*. Samatha means stopping, calming.

*Sam* has the meaning of lulling, it is like a lullaby, to take care of it like a baby; to calm it down; to stop its crying; to make it feel peaceful. Samatha is like that, because there is a child in us always suffering, always agitated. That is the other aspect of the monkey, always agitating, always suffering, always crying, and samatha is the practice to stop, to calm and to embrace.

There is a child that suffers in us. There is a monkey who is restless in us. But we need someone to take care of the child, to take care of the monkey, to embrace them. We have to provide that person that will do the work. We cannot let the monkey be alone. We cannot let the hungry ghost in us, the hungry child, the suffering child in us, to be alone. We have to come home and take care and embrace. That is the practice of samatha.

The Chinese *ti* means to stop, to stop the suffering, to stop the agitation. You can bring a lot of peace, of comfort, through the practice of samatha. When you are calm, when you are comforted, then you can practice the other part of meditation, which is *vipasyana*. It means looking deeply. Looking deeply in order to understand. When you are concentrated, you are calm, you are in a position to look and to see, that kind of vision will have the power to liberate you from the rest of the suffering in you. These are two elements of Buddhist meditation. When you come to Plum Village, your purpose is not to learn Buddhist philosophy or Pali or Sanskrit or Tibetan or Vietnamese. Your purpose in coming to Plum Village is to learn how to embrace the suffering child within you, the hungry ghost within, the turbulent monkey within. That's samatha.

So learn the practice. There are many forms of practice that can help you to do this. And after you have held it in your loving arms, you'll be able to look deeply and to get the kind of wisdom, to get the kind of understanding that will liberate you. Liberation in Buddhism is liberation by insight, not by grace. That insight would not be possible without the practice of looking meditation. *Dyana*, meditation, has two components: embracing, calming and then looking deeply into the nature of what is. And these are two elements of transformation and healing.

[Bell]

I am home. I wish that you are also. We need some kind of energy to do the work of calming and embracing. The monkey is there, turbulent. The child is there, suffering. We need someone who will do the work of calming, stopping and that is the energy of mindfulness. Mindfulness is the energy that has the power of calming, stopping and healing, and by practicing walking meditation, breathing mindfully, eating mindfully, doing things mindfully, then we can generate that energy to embrace. That energy is considered to be the substance of a Buddha. I would call it the holy spirit.

Mindfulness is the capacity of being aware of what is there in the present moment. When I drink some water, I can drink mindfully or I can drink while thinking of other things. When I drink my water mindfully I am real. I am myself, body and mind together, 100 percent. Because I am there 100 percent of myself the water reveals herself to me 100 percent also. So both me and the water are real and in that moment of water drinking life is real. By drinking my water in mindfulness, I am going home. In that home I touch myself and I touch the water I drink. It's not abstract. In our daily life we eat, we drink, we shake hands, but we are not really there. We are lost in the past, in the future, lost in our worries, our fear. We are not really there. Everything is superficial, everything is like a ghost. To practice mindfulness is to produce your true presence. Your true presence means the presence of you body and your mind together in the here and the now. You can train yourself by drinking your water. Drink your water in such a way that you become real--100 percent.

One day my teacher said, "My child, would you go and get me a bamboo stick." I was very eager to satisfy the request of my teacher so I went out and I didn't close the door mindfully behind me. You love your teacher. You want to love. But you don't know how to love. You are very eager to help him, to serve him. My teacher called me back. "Novice." I came and I joined my hands. "You did not close the door behind you mindfully. Please do it again." So I got the teaching, so I took time, became myself, pulled myself together and made mindful steps in

the direction of the door. Holding the knob, I breathe in, I open it, I step out mindfully, I close it, I breathe out mindfully, and from the door to the place where I find the bamboo stick I continue to practice walking meditation. I have learned how to love my teacher. To love a teacher means to be what the teacher would like to be. A teacher by yourself. My teacher did not have to teach me a second time. I always know how to close the door properly.

In 1966, going to America to plead for a stop of the bombing, I visited American Trappist monk Thomas Merton. I spent one day, one night with him. I was scheduled to give the monks a talk. But I lost my voice, because the speaking tour was very hectic, and I had to work too hard. So I only had time with Thomas. Instead of me giving the talk he gave the talk for me. I just sat and listened. He said, "Dear brothers, when I saw Thich Nhat Hahn closing the door I knew he was a real monk. A monk can understand a monk." And someone in Germany, very deep in her Catholic tradition, she managed to hear that talk. She wanted to come to Plum Village in order to see how Thich Nhat Hahn closed a door. She came last winter, during a retreat and she stayed for nearly one month, and she observed. She observed the monks, the nuns, and she observed me. I did not know she was trying to observe how we close our doors. In the last day of her stay, we had a formal lunch here in this Still Water Hall and she said some special words to say goodbye. She told us the story of why she had come to Plum Village. She stayed in the New Hamlet, she enjoyed it a lot.

So when you come to Plum Village, please do learn how to close the door properly. How to drink your water properly. How to walk properly from your tent to the kitchen, from the toilet to the meditation hall. Never go without mindfulness. That is the training here. Don't make any step without mindfulness, breathing in and make one, or two or three steps, like you want, and breathing out you do the same. Breathing in you make one step, two step. In the beginning you look like you pretend to be peaceful, to be relaxed, because the monkey in you is pushing you. It pushes even during the night. But you know, to tame the monkey, to tame the horse, to tame the wild elephant, it what the Buddha taught us to do. A mind that is not tamed creates a lot of suffering. A mind that has been tamed can bring a lot of happiness.

So practice walking in such a way that you can arrive in every step. Breathing in, breathing in, breathing out, breathing out. You walk like you walk in the Kingdom of God. Right here, right now, don't wait until you die. In America one time I give a talk in a big church and I said "You don't need to die in order to enter the Kingdom of God, in fact you have to be very alive in order to do so. Breathe in, become mindful, become truly alive, and you make one step, only one step can bring you into the Kingdom of God, right here, right now." That's what

we should do while we are in Plum Village. Every time you make a step, please make it mindfully, so that the land you tread will be the Kingdom of God, will be the Pure Land. It is the land of hell, or the land of God. It depends on your way of walk, not on the geological conditions. You have heard that the Kingdom of God is in you. You have heard that the Buddha land is in you. Touch it, make it real, walk in such a way that solidity and peace and non-fear can be possible.

Train yourself. I myself, monks, nuns and permanent residents in Plum Village, we practice walking meditation all year round. Not only during retreats, all year round. With retreat or without retreat. We make a place into our true home. We learn to stop. I will offer you a short gatha for your practice of walking and sitting. When you breathe in, you pay attention to your in-breath that is all. That is not a thought there is no thinking. Pay attention to your in-breath--that is called the practice of mindfulness of breathing. Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in. It is like, drinking water; I know that I am drinking water. Mindfulness: conscious of what is going on, in the present moment. And when you breathe in, you enjoy your in-breath, because it is enjoyable, your in-breath. It is enjoyable, breathing in. Remember there was a time when your nose was stuffed, and you could not breath in and out. Remember the asthma crisis. Remember when you were locked in a room where there was no fresh air.

You want to breathe freely, the wonderful fresh air, clean air. This is available in Plum Village. You have a nose that is not stuffed. You have lungs that can pump the air. All conditions are sufficient for you to enjoy your breathing. One day you lie down on your bed, and you can no longer breathe, and no matter what people do to you, you cannot breathe again. So breathe in and feel that you are alive. It is a wonderful thing. You don't need to be trained for ten years in order to breathe in, you can succeed today. In breathing in enjoy the fact that you are breathing in. Wonderful. Mindful breathing. You may use a few words to guide you: "I have arrived." Arrived where? At least I arrive to myself; I am going back to myself, because I am restoring myself, body and mind together. In our daily life our mind and our body are seldom together. That is the state of distraction. Our body is here, but our mind is elsewhere. Caught in the past, caught in the future, caught in our worries, our anger. Therefore, the practice of breathing in is to bring mind and body together. Suddenly you have home to go back to. You can produce your true presence. I have arrived. And when you breathe out, you say "I am home". In French you say "Je suis chez moi, je suis arrive".

Your home is in the here and the now, because life is in the here and the now. This is a very important teaching of the Buddha that many people neglect. In a sutra the Buddha said "Don't cling to the past, the past is no longer there. Do not get upset about the future, the future is not yet there. Only the present moment is

available, and the wise person lives mindfully and happily in the present moment." That is a text teaching us how to live deeply each moment of our daily life. According to the teaching, life is available only in the present. Your appointment with life is in the present moment. If you get lost in the past and the future and miss the present moment, it means you miss your appointment with life. What a pity. We miss our appointment with life so many times a day. We are not truly there. We sit there, yes, but our child comes and she does not find us. Our body is there but are absorbed in our thinking and worries and projects. Our child is disappointed. We are not really there for him, for her.

[Bell]

To love means to be there for the person you love. The most precious gift you can make to the beloved one is your presence. So you need to breathe in and breathe out and there you are in the present moment. Your home is available only in the present moment. Breathe in and breathe out, bring your mind back to your body, smile. There you are home, your home in the present moment. Everything you are looking for is in the present moment, including God, including the Pure Land, including the Buddha. The blue sky, life, especially life, can only be touched in the present moment. When could life be touch? Where else? Only the present moment. So the practice here in Plum Village is to go back to the present moment, every time, and to go back by the techniques of walking and breathing. Always go back to the here and the now, because it is the only place where you can find your home, your address. Your true address is: body, mind, united here and now. You don't need any zip code.

It is also the address of God. It is the address of Kingdom of God, it is the address of our ancestors, all our beloved ones are there. The address of love. The address of compassion. The address of freedom, also. It is written the same: body and mind united, here and now. You go back to it every time. By the techniques of breathing and walking. I have arrived I am home. Suddenly you don't feel the need to run. You have run for many lifetimes. Because you don't know that your true life, your true home is in the here and the now.

You think you cannot be happy in the here and the now. That is why you continue to run. Somehow you think that happiness is not possible in the here and the now. You still need more conditions. You think that in the future, maybe, you can find them. That is why you continue to run. But if you go home, you'll find that you have more than enough conditions to be happy. You can be happy right now, right here. Remember the teachings of the Buddha: "It is possible to live happily in the present moment." You may say, "But how can I be happy when I have lots of pain, worries in me?" The Buddha said "yes, it's possible to

be happy with some pain and sorrow and worry in you." The garden may have some garbage within, but that does not prevent the flowers from blooming. If you know how to make compost, you cherish this garbage, because without the garbage you have nothing with which to make compost to nourish the flowers. The Buddha would smile, "My dear ones, you need some suffering, you need some garbage in order to help the flowers in your garden to bloom." So let us not be too worried about the pain, the sorrow, the difficulties in us. It is still possible to live happily with some suffering, some pain, in us.

You know a boat. When you throw a rock into the river it will sink to the bottom of the river. No rock can float on the surface of the water like a flower. But if you have a boat, you can put kilograms of rocks in it and the boat will still float. So with this amount of suffering in you, if you manage to have a boat, then you can still float. You can enjoy your rowing back and forth across the lake or the river. Learn the art of generating the energy of mindfulness. Mindfulness is the boat that can embrace, that can transport, that can transform. You know you can do it.

Don't lose any minute of your day. Each minute of your day is to generate the energy of mindfulness: walking, breathing, sitting. You breathe in, you enjoy your breathing and you say, "I have arrived." The purpose is to stop running. When you breathe out you say, "I am home." Your home begins to reveal itself. If you are a beginner, you have not explored entirely your true home yet. But at least you already have access. You touch it and the more you touch it, the more your true home will reveal itself to you. You don't have to take a long time. The moment when you know how to breathe in, some peace, some joy, some stability is already born in you. That is the characteristic of the dharma. It does not need a lot of time. You can see the effect of the practice right now, right here.

Breathe in, allow yourself breathe in naturally. Don't try to struggle in order to breathe in. Why do you have to struggle breathing in? If you struggle like that after a few minutes of breathing in and out you will be exhausted. So learn how to breathe. Allow yourself to breathe in and out naturally. Don't try to make it longer or deeper. Just breathe normally, like when you sit in your living room, or when you enjoy your garden behind the house. Only turn on the energy of mindfulness, and become aware of you in breath and out breath. If it is short, you know that this is a short breath. If it is long, then you know this is a long breath. That's all. To recognize your breathing as it. Don't interfere, don't try to bend, to correct, to do anything, leave it alone. Only observe it. In our daily life, we breathe but we don't breathe mindfully. In our practice we continue to breathe but we learn to breathe mindfully. No effort should be made in the breathing. There should be only the practice of being aware of your breathing.



When you breathe in you may feel more peaceful. Especially when you come to the second or third breath. Naturally, if you breathe mindfully for three or four times, the quality of your breathing will be improved, without your effort to improve it at all. Those of us who have practiced, we know about this. So, I have arrived, I am home. You sit on your cushion practicing sitting meditation, you may enjoy just this: "I have arrived, I am home." There is no need for me to run anymore. You can feel the effects of stopping in you. If you feel that the restlessness in you is diminished and you enjoy doing nothing, just sitting and breathing, you have made progress. A few minutes later you must shift into the second line of the poem: "In the here and the now." In fact, this second line is exactly the same as the first one. It means the same thing. "Where do I arrive?" I arrive in the here. Where is my home, my home is in the now. Because life is in that moment. The beautiful sunset, the beautiful vegetation, the full moon, the person you love, the fresh air, the plum. Everything has to be touched in the present moment. If you are not in the present moment, these things are not for you.

Suppose you are standing with ten people, looking in the direction of the sunset. The sunset is beautiful. Many people enjoy the sunset. How colorful, how glorious the sunset is. But you don't see the beautiful sunset, because you stand there with other people, but you are absorbed in your worries. Your mind is thinking of tomorrow after tomorrow, or the past. So the sunset is not for you. The sunset is for those who are present in the here and the now. The condition, the basic condition to enjoy the sunset, is to be there, body and mind united, and that condition can be fulfilled by just one mindful in breath and out breath. Do you have to make any special effort to enjoy a beautiful sunset? Not at all. Just be there. When you breathe in and breathe out mindfully, all the thinking, all the worries are eliminated. Your true presence is needed for the sunset to reveal herself.

So in the here and the now is our true home. You might enjoy: "Breathing in I feel I have established myself in the here, breathing out I dwell solidly in the now." You are touching life in the present moment. That is the purpose of your sitting meditation. Don't try to become a Buddha; don't try to become something else, someone else. Be yourself, totally alive on your cushion. Do not think, because breathing in, breathing out is not that hard. The practice is not to be lost in your thinking. "I think therefore I am not." To be and not to think. To think is not to be. To be means to be something. To be your true home, or to be your worries, your running, your sorrow. And to be your true home, this is not thinking.

"I am solid, I am free." Solidity is the basic condition for happiness. Solidity, stability, that is what we have to cultivate. In a sitting position, you cultivate the solidity of your body position. The lotus and half lotus position are the best, otherwise, you will have to look for the chrysanthemum position. The chrysanthemum position is whatever position that you are most comfortable in, and you may have to look for a cushion or two; you have to find out your chrysanthemum position. That is an alternative to your lotus or half lotus. You may spend one or two hours with every kind of cushion until you find it. When you find it, you can be comfortable for half an hour of sitting.

Solidity of the body and sitting still is one of the ways of cultivating the stability of the body. When you have stability of the body, the stability of the mind will increase, and vice versa. If you have stability of the mind, you can sit very still; and if you can sit very still, you will be able to be more peaceful and solid in your mind. So the two things help each other.

"I am free." Free from what? This is not political freedom. This is free from worries, from attachment to the past, from worries about the future. We are assailed by many thoughts, by many worries, by many kinds of anxiety and fear. We are not free and that is why we are not happy. When you have come back to yourself, you will touch so many of the conditions that can make you happy. You will find that it is possible to be happy right here and right now, in the sitting position, in the walking meditation, while making my breakfast, while cooking for the community, while washing the dishes, while washing my clothes. I can be happy washing my clothes. You see, when you do your dishes, you might like to do it quickly so that you can sit down and enjoy your coffee, so the time of washing dishes is lost. You have to learn how to enjoy dish washing.

When I was a novice, I had to wash dishes for one hundred monks. I did not have hot water, soap. I had to boil the water. I had to use ash and coconut skin, and together with the other novice we had a good time washing dishes, because we had learned the art of mindful dish washing. When I came to the West, I wrote a book to tell people how to enjoy washing the dishes. Some of you may have read it; it is *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. You have to be alive and joyful and happy when you wash your dishes.

You have to make life possible, worth living, during the time of dish washing, otherwise, when you sit down for tea and coffee, you will not be able to enjoy your tea and your coffee. You will think of anything else. You put your coffee down and go and look for the telephone book for some telephone number and call and leave your coffee cold. You know about this. So we can never be happy. We postpone happiness until later on. Never. So the principle is: how to be

happy right now. If someone asked you, "Has the most wonderful moment of your life arrived yet? The best moment of your life, has it arrived yet." You may be embarrassed. You may say, "It seems that that wonderful moment of my life has not arrived yet, but I believe strongly that it will arrive soon, sometime in the future." We want to cling to that belief. We want to be happy some time. It is absurd that we would be unhappy for all of our life. We all believe like that. And you know very well that if you continue to live in forgetfulness, like you have lived the past 20 years or 30 years, and then that wonderful moment will not happen within the next 20 or 30 years, or ever. So the teaching of the Buddha is clear. Don't wait; make the present moment into the most wonderful moment of your life. That is possible, with the energy of mindfulness. Breathing in, dish washing is wonderful. Because I am alive, my eyes are in good condition, my feet are strong, I have a roof to live under. There are so many conditions of happiness available to you now.

Go home and you will see. Go home and you will know that you are lucky, that living happily in the present moment is possible. That is the only way to help you to stop otherwise you continue to run. Stopping is the basic condition of happiness. Solidity and freedom are described as the two basic characteristics of nirvana. When you are solid, when you are free, afflictions can no longer bother you, non-fear is in you, and you enjoy every moment in your daily life. These two kinds of energy, solidity and freedom, have to be cultivated. Your practice of breathing and walking, of doing everything in mindfulness, to go back to the present moment and to establish yourself in the present moment, is the practice of cultivating solidity, stability and freedom. You know, people who are not solid, people who are not free, they suffer a lot. Free from anger, free from illusion, free from misunderstanding, free from despair. That kind of freedom is the base for our happiness.

So, you are touching nirvana, you are touching your home, you are touching the Kingdom of God, while practicing. You don't mention your true home, you don't mention the kingdom of God, you don't mention nirvana, but you are touching nirvana with your body, with your feelings. The Buddha said, "You can touch nirvana with your body, in the here, in the now." If I translate into the language of Christianity, you can enter the Kingdom of God, right here, right now. God is available to you 24 hours a day. "God is your happiness." There is a French writer who wrote these lines. His name is Andre Gide.

"In the ultimate, I dwell." The ultimate is your true home, where there is no birth, no death; no being, no nonbeing; no up, no down. You are totally safe, no fear at all. And this is available to you in the here and the now. Am I too optimistic?

Look at these waves on the ocean. [Thay draws on chalk board.] Wave Number One, Wave Number Two, Number Three, Number Four, etc. To live the life of a wave is very hard. Each of us is a wave. There is a certain moment when you believe that you were born, and there must be a moment when you will die and will no longer be there, right? These are the things that continued to assail us every day. "I did not exist before that. I will vanish completely after that point. I am. Before that, I was not and after this, I will not be." These ideas, you are not free from them, and they create your fear and your whole block of fear in here, and you become a philosopher.

Second question, "What can I do to be like the other waves?" He is so superb. He is admired by so many other waves. Why God has created me as a small wave and he a big one? So jealousy, discrimination, are born here and you want to become a revolutionary. You want to make everything equal. So, the ideal of high and low, more or less beautiful, all these things continue to assail you as you continue to live the life of the wave. You are not solid; you are not free. But there is another dimension of you that you have not touched. You have touched the dimension of waves. It is called a historical dimension, where there is birth, death; up, down, being and nonbeing, but you have not touched the other dimension that I mentioned, the dimension of the water. So you go down to yourself. You get back to yourself, to your true home, as a way of your looking for your true home. You want to arrive, but you never arrive. Your true home is right there, into you, the water.

It is possible for a wave to live the life of a wave and to live the life of water at the same time. That is our practice. We have to live our ultimate dimension right here and right now. And it is by going back to the here and the now that we can touch the ultimate dimension, our ultimate dimension. Looking from the phenomenal aspect, you see a wave, and each wave is different from all the other waves. There is a self there is non-self. But when you get down to your true home, water, you are no longer afraid. As water, I can never die. There is no high, no low; no more beautiful, no less beautiful. How wonderful. Water is the true nature of waves, and at the time you realize that you are water, you become solid. You become free. No ideas, no fear, no craving can assail you anymore.

In fact, water is available to the wave 24 hours a day. The ultimate, God, is available to you, nirvana, the world of no birth and no death is available to you in the here and the now. You have to trust. You have to surrender to the ultimate reality. God is your true happiness. Enjoy God 24 hours a day. What you are looking for, the kingdom of God, the Pure Land, the true home is in here, if you know how to breathe in and go back to the here and the now. If you train yourself to be solid, to touch deeply life in the present moment, you touch the

ultimate reality, also. You are cultivating the Kingdom of God; you are cultivating your solidity and freedom. The ultimate is made of solidity and freedom. As I said, nirvana is made of solidity and freedom. If you have these two elements, you won't suffer any more. Birth is okay; death is okay; small is okay; big is okay. No longer any discrimination, because you dwell in the ultimate.

I have made this gatha for my own practice more than a decade ago and I find it very helpful, very, very effective. Shall we sing together in English?

I have arrived I am home,  
In the here and in the now.  
I have arrived I am home,  
In the here and in the now.

I am solid. I am free.  
I am solid. I am free.  
In the ultimate I dwell.  
In the ultimate I dwell.

[Thay leads Sangha in singing French language version of the gatha.]

This gatha is also available for your walking meditation. You pick up one of the five exercises and when you practice, you breathe in and you make two steps or three steps. In the meditation hall, we make only one step, because we can afford to do so, but outside it would look more natural if you walk a little bit quicker. When you have mastered the walk, you can run mindfully, also. But you can only run mindfully if you already know how to walk mindfully.

So breathing in, you can make, say, two steps. It is good for beginners. "I have arrived, arrived." When you breath out, say, "I am home. I am home." And do it again. And don't just say the word. Live it. When you pronounce the words, "I have arrived," you have to arrive. You have to stop running: running within; running without. You don't run anymore as you walk slowly, yes, but who knows that you have stopped inside? So, you have to stop running. You have to arrive. And, you have to train yourself. We are all here, around you to support you, because we all doing the same. If you lose your step and you get lost, and the monkey takes the lead. Then you see us and you go back and you embrace your monkey again. And say, "Dear monkey let us walk together."

You know, in Plum Village, all of us have signed a treaty with the stairs. Many of us live in buildings with stairs, and we always practice climbing up the stairs in

mindfulness, enjoying every step going down. I have stairs in my hermitage. I have practiced going up and coming down the stairs for twenty years. Never, never, have I betrayed my commitment. So, you may like to sign a treaty with your stairs.

When you begin to take the first step, you can breathe in and out in such a way that peace and joy is possible. Life is possible and the stopping is possible. Be determined to do so. When you are a beginner, the habit energy is very strong. The horse is to be tamed. The elephant has to be tamed. The monkey has to be embraced. And we are there to support you. If halfway, you realize that you have not been mindful in walking, you stop, go down and you begin again.

The monks and the nuns in Plum Village, all of them have signed the peace treaty, the mindfulness treaty. Those of us who don't live in a place where there are stairs, we sign with a section of the path, from this tree to the that rock in the garden, 50 or 100 meters, according to you. Any time you pass that path, you have to walk mindfully each step and if halfway, you get lost, go back. You don't need to hurry to go to the meditation hall, because you are meditating right here, right now. So don't run to the meditation hall.

We have climbed the mountain where the Buddha lived. We have climbed the mountain in Wu Tai Shan, and we received a lot of pleasure climbing these mountains. They are sacred. But everywhere we go offering retreats; we walk in the same way. Everywhere is the Gridhrakuta Mountain. Everywhere is the Wu Tai Shan mountain. Everywhere is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is really available if you know how to walk.

One day, climbing into an airplane in Asia in a country of the Third World, I noticed I was climbing on aluminum stairs, not very solid. But I climbed with the same kind of quality of practice. I enjoyed every step. I climbed into the airplane just like I climbed the Gridhrakuta Mountain or walk in the Upper Hamlet. So be determined not to lose any more of your life, of your time. Stop and enjoy every step you make.

The Zen master Lin Chi said, "The miracle is to walk on earth." Not on water, not on the burning charcoal, but to walk on earth. So please perform the miracle every time you use your feet and you will learn the art of stopping and living deeply each moment of your life. And you walk like that, not only for you, yourself; you walk for all of us. You walk for all our ancestors and our children and their children, also. So, please this morning, my friends, you have learned how to listen to the bell; how to breathe in and out and arrive, and how to enjoy our walking. When you practice for one week, you'll see the difference.

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# Watering Our Good Seeds

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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I have a topic for Dharma discussion for the young people today. You have organized in groups, speaking the same language, and we expect you to bring your insights to the Sangha tomorrow. Twenty-four hours is not a lot. I don't like to set a deadline, if you are not ready tomorrow, then after tomorrow is all right. This is the Dharma discussion topic. Please remember.

Once upon a time there was a monk who was not happy. Maybe his name was *Freres Jacques*. You know the song, *Freres Jacques*? He was a lazy monk. He did not want to ring the bell in the morning. So, once upon a time there was a monk who was not so happy, and he blamed other monks for his unhappiness. He had a roommate, and his roommate was not happy either, because that monk always complained. He complained about this, complained about that. So sometime later the other monk asked to be moved to another room, to have another roommate.

Of course, like I do, you desire to help that monk to be happy so he would stop complaining. What can I do to help him? We have to find out. We are caught in a kind of dilemma, because I know if a person does not make people around him happy, he cannot be happy himself. And this applies not only to monks. If you are unable to make the people around you happy, how can you be happy? In the teaching of the Buddha I have learned one very basic thing: happiness is not an individual matter. Maybe some of you still believe that happiness can be sought by individuals that we should just go and look for our own kind of happiness.

Happiness we believe can be an individual matter, but according to the teaching of the Buddha, our teacher, happiness is not an individual matter. If the other person is not happy, there is no way that you can be happy. Look. Consider a couple. The couple might be husband and wife. If the husband is unhappy, do you think that the wife can be happy? No, I don't think so. If the wife is unhappy, do you think that the husband can be really happy? No. So there is no point of looking for individual happiness. If you want you to be happy, you have to make the other person happy. Take the example of another couple, a father and a son. Do you think that if the father is unhappy, the son can be happy? No. If the son



suffers so much, do you think that the father can be happy himself? No. That is why it is very realistic to see and to accept the fact that happiness cannot be an individual matter.

We have to practice looking deeply to really understand the teaching of the Buddha. A mother who is unhappy cannot make her daughter happy. If her daughter suffers so much, the mother will not be able to be happy herself. So it's clear that happiness is not a personal matter. Therefore, when we look at that poor monk we see that because he is not able to make the people around him happy, namely the other brothers, he cannot be happy. He seems to be trying to look for his individual happiness. But that is wrong. It is not in line with the teaching of the Buddha. So you might come to the conclusion that in order for that monk to be happy, he has to try to make the people around him happy, right? It seems logical. It seems clear that to be happy himself, he has to be able to make his roommate happy and other monks in the same monastery happy.

But there still is another problem. That is why I need you to practice looking deeply with me. How can an unhappy person make the people around him or her happy? Is there a way? He knows that if he cannot be happy, he cannot make people around him happy. He is motivated by the desire to make people around him happy, but because he has no happiness in himself, how could he share his happiness and make other people happy? Do you think that you have got the topic of the dharma discussion? That is a kind of dilemma. I need a young person to tell me whether I have presented the topic clearly enough.

I want you to spend one or two days sitting together, practicing breathing in, breathing out, deeply, doing walking meditation, in order to be calm, to be concentrated, and when you come together, you offer your insight as to how to help that monk. And the dilemma is that if that monk wants to be happy, he has to make people around him happy. The question remains that if he is unhappy, how can he make other people around him happy? And you grown up people, if you want to practice looking deeply to find out, you are welcome to do so.

Once upon a time there was an unhappy monk. That is the topic. But you can change the word "monk," because it is not only a matter of monks and nuns. If you like, you can change it to an unhappy boy or girl, son or daughter, husband or wife. Chicolina, do you think it's clear enough? Good.

The last thing I would like to tell you today is that during the past week many children have practiced, have learned the practice of pebble meditation and the practice of inviting the bell of mindfulness to sound. I count on you, those who have been here one week, to help your friends who just arrived yesterday to

learn about these two practices. At the end of this week they will be able to do as well as you do. Do you think that you can do it for us? Inviting the bell, and practicing the pebble meditation? Good. I think that is enough as an assignment today. Have a happy day. When you hear the bell, stand up and bow to the Sangha before you leave to begin your practice.

[Bell]

Turn around to the Sangha. Bow. Go slowly, beautifully, like flowers.

[Bell]

Dear friends, today is the twenty-third of July 1997 and we are in the Upper Hamlet. Listening to a Dharma talk is also a form of practice. We used to be in school, listening to lectures and so on, and during that time we got in the habit of using only our intellect, because what we needed in school was our intellect. But in a practice center a Dharma talk is not just a lecture. A Dharma talk is an opportunity to open ourselves up and to allow the deepest levels of our consciousness to be exposed to the Dharma. Instead of using the intellect, we put the intellect to rest, because our intellect has the tendency to compare, to judge, to evaluate, to arrange things and ideas and classify them into boxes.

The Dharma is not a lecture. The Dharma in the Buddhist tradition is a kind of rain. Our consciousness should behave like the soil, the earth. We have to allow the Dharma talk to penetrate. According to the Buddha we have seeds of understanding, of awakening, of compassion, within ourselves. We don't need these seeds to be transmitted from the teacher. We already have all of them in the depth of our consciousness. We call it store consciousness, sometimes earth consciousness. Because these seeds are buried deep in the mind, in the soil of our consciousness, it is very hard for them to grow and manifest. Above there are many layers of suffering, confusion, prejudices and so on, and our intellect can never go deep enough. Our intellect very often contradicts our deepest nature and therefore to allow the intellect to rest and to open our earth store in order for the rain of the Dharma to penetrate is very important. [Thây recites a poem in Vietnamese and then translates]

The spring rain is falling gently  
and the earth and the soil of my consciousness  
is penetrated by the rain.  
And the seed deep within me  
now has a chance to be penetrated by the rain and to smile, sprouting.

We have to listen to the Dharma with that kind of spirit, to allow the soil of our consciousness to be penetrated by the Dharma rain, not using ideas, concepts, that we already have to compare and to classify. That is very important. If we are already used to that kind of listening, using only the intellect to judge, to compare, to classify, we have to learn a new way, because listening to a Dharma talk is not the same thing as learning the philosophy of Buddhism. They are two things, quite different. A lady who left us yesterday said that during one hour and a half, Thây said very much the same thing. He could have done it in fifteen minutes. She was very hungry for ideas, but she did not realize that a Dharma talk is a time for practice. The teacher is supposed to offer the Dharma rain in such a way that the good seeds in the people can be penetrated and can sprout and become flowers, the flower of understanding, the flower of compassion and so on.

Using our intellect is like using a nylon sheet to order to receive the rain, or nylon buckets to receive the rain. When you use a nylon sheet, you prevent the rain from penetrating into the soil. That is why there is a way to listen to Dharma talks. That way is not to use your intellect. You let your whole person be penetrated by the Dharma, and your person includes the body. We know that our consciousness has so many layers and the deepest layers are very difficult to reach and therefore we have to bring our selves to a state of oneness. The body is there and the mind is there, the consciousness is there, and we just allow the rain of the Dharma to fall.

In the time of the Buddha it is reported in many sutras, many people would get enlightened during the Dharma talk and their eyes would get very bright and they were released from the bondage they had carried with them for a long time. When the Buddha saw that person, he always said, "That person got liberated. That person has understood. That person has been transformed." So transformation and hearing can be possible also during a Dharma talk. Don't believe that in a dharma talk you get the theory and then you go back to your tent and practice. No. Listening to a dharma talk is also a form of practice. That is why we have to sit in such a way that we are really present, body and consciousness at the same time. We have to dwell in the present moment. We have to allow ourselves to be available to the Dharma and the Dharma will be available to us.

Even if you feel sleepy and sit there dozing in the Dharma hall, it's much better than using your intellect. Yes, this is true, because even if you are sleeping, the Dharma talk has a way of penetrating you, but if you use your intellect, it is very difficult. Maybe you have had experience with someone in a coma. If you talk to her, she has a way of listening. She is present in a way that she can be receptive

when you talk to her. When you allow your intellect to rest, many beautiful things can penetrate into you and you get a transformation.

There are people who after listening to a Dharma talk have felt liberated, light, joyful, and they didn't have to do much. They didn't have to listen hard or make any effort. They just opened themselves up to the Dharma to entered. That is why we should consider the one hour and a half listening to the Dharma talk as a time of practice. It may be very important.

The other day I was talking about holiness and I said that the nature of holiness can be understood, can be recognized. We call someone "His Holiness" or "Her Holiness." But what makes us call him or her by that title "Holiness"? There is, or there may be, the substance of holiness in that person. In the Buddhist tradition the substance of holiness is mindfulness.

When I wrote *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, I said that mindfulness is the energy of the Buddha that is in you and its nature is the same nature as the Holy Spirit, because where there is mindfulness, there is life. Where there is attention, there is life. When you drink a glass of orange juice in mindfulness, you are real and the juice is real, and because you and the juice are real, life is real. If you drink your orange juice in forgetfulness, you are caught by your anger, your jealousy; you are caught by the past, by the fear of the future, you are not really there for your orange juice and your orange juice is not really there for you. So you and orange juice, both of you are not real, and therefore, life is not real at that moment.

So to drink mindfully means to be alive again, to live deeply that moment of orange juice drinking. Since the energy of mindfulness is in you, the energy of holiness is in you. Where there is mindfulness there is life, your presence and the presence of life in you. Then if you continue to contemplate mindfulness, you will see that you will become more concentrated. Yes, you drink mindfully your orange juice; you are concentrated, even if your juice is not concentrated. Every step you make when you practice walking meditation makes you concentrated. You touch life deeply every step you make. So mindfulness is there and concentration is there, also.

Mindfulness carries within itself the energy of concentration. If you are concentrated, you are strong. When you look deeply, you touch deeply, and because you are able to look deeply and touch deeply, you get insight. You understand the nature of what is there: the object of your touching, the object of your looking. Therefore, the energy of concentration carries itself. The energy of insight is a liberating factor. If we suffer because we don't understand, because we are overwhelmed by illusion, ignorance, once we get insight we no longer

suffer. We are no longer angry and suspicious. Therefore, our insight is the liberating factor, and without concentration and mindfulness, insight would not be possible. That is why I said that the energy of mindfulness is the vehicle transporting concentration and concentration carries itself.

*Prajna* is insight. Concentration is *samádhi*, and mindfulness is *smṛti*. *Smṛti*, *samádhi*, and *prajña* are the three steps of training in the Buddhist path. Our practice is recognizing the seed of mindfulness in us. In holy people, there is a seed of mindfulness, but in all of us there is also a seed of mindfulness. If you practice recognizing that seed deep in our consciousness and help it to grow and to manifest often, the energy of mindfulness increases all the time and it is the substance of holiness in us. So, first of all, the practice is to recognize that we do have that seed deep in our consciousness and this is easy because every one of us is able to drink our juice mindfully. Every one of us is able to look at a flower mindfully. Every one of us is capable of breathing in mindfully. So the seed of mindfulness is really there, deep inside of us. We don't live our daily life mindfully because we have not allowed that seed of mindfulness in us to be touched every day by ourselves and by the people around us. We have not been able to make it grow and become important in our lives.

The practice of mindfulness is first of all to recognize that seed and to do everything for that seed to be touched every day and to become a source of energy that will make us more alive in our daily life. When we know how to live mindfully, we live concentrated. And if we live concentrated, we begin to understand deeply. When we understand deeply, we suffer much less. If these three kinds of energies are within us, we are a holy person. We have no complex about that, because we know exactly what holiness means.

Holiness is something we can recognize. It is not abstract. If we look at a person and we know that she is mindful, she is alive, she is concentrated in each moment of her daily life, she is able to understand, to be compassionate, to forgive, then we know that holiness is in her. You can call her "Your Holiness." No complex. Holiness is not a title conferred to someone just by society, but by the fact that we are able to generate the energy of mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

[Bell]

The bell of mindfulness was created to help us touch the seed of mindfulness and make it manifest. Every time we hear the sound of the bell, we go back to our breath and we breathe mindfully. Mindfulness of breathing nurtures the energy of mindfulness in us. It's easy to practice if you are surrounded by a sangha,

brothers and sisters who do the same. In Plum Village, every time you hear the bell, you see all the brothers and sisters going back to their breathing and enjoying their in-breath and their out-breath. You will do the same in a very natural way. In a few weeks, you will get the habit, the good habit of going back to your mindful breathing.

The same is true with your mindful walking. In Plum Village everyone walks mindfully. Each step is an opportunity for us to touch the seed of mindfulness in us. We enjoy every step we make. Before the practice, we only know how to run. We run because we think that happiness is not possible now and here. We have to run to the other end where happiness may be available. We have a long, long habit of running. We run even in our dreams. Our ancestors have run, and they have transmitted their habit of running to us and we shall transmit the habit of running to our children.

When we come to Plum Village, we learn that happiness is available in the here and the now. Why to you have to run? To breathe in and out feeling that you are alive, and to make a step feeling that walking on this beautiful planet is already a miracle, is enough for you to be happy right now. You don't need another condition to be happy. So learning to be happy here and now with the conditions of happiness that are already available, this is what we learn in Plum Village. That is why everyone tries to block the old habit of running. Blocking in a very nice way, not by fighting, but by initiating a new habit, the habit of walking like a free person, like a happy person. In the beginning you might pretend to be a free person, a happy person, because the habit is so strong, but after a few days being in the Sangha, you know that you can do it, you can enjoy every step you make. You say, "It's so simple! Why didn't I know about it? Just breathe in, make a step, smile and you can be happy." Some people still wonder, "How could it be so simple?" Something this simple might not be true, because we are used to complicated things. There is a person who was reading one of my books in a bus, and after reading it—it's a very short book—she closed it and began to practice right on the bus. She felt wonderful, because she didn't believe that truth is something very complicated.

Every two years we have a 21-day retreat here in Plum Village and everyone has to attend the whole retreat. We don't go in and out like in the summer opening here. On the first day, everyone is offered a sticker that they can put on their shoes. The sticker says, "I walk for you." If you can make a peaceful step and get nourishment from that step, get peace and joy from making that step, not only do you make yourself healed, transformed, joyful, but you make other people happy, also. When you are happy you have something to share. When you are happy, you can make people around you happy. Our parents may not have had

the chance to enjoy mindful breathing, mindful walking, and they hurried for all their life. They didn't know how to enjoy their in-breath, out-breath, relaxation, and dwelling happily in the present moment. Now, we have a chance to learn it so that every breath I take in, I feel freedom, I feel relaxation, I feel peace.

I breathe in not only for me but I breathe in for all my ancestors. Practicing looking deeply, I know that all my ancestors are still alive in me, present in me. I am the continuation of my ancestors. Therefore I breathe in and I invite my mother, my father, my grandfather to breathe in with me. It's wonderful. I practice for them. I also practice for my children, because anything I do to me, I do to my ancestors, I do to my children. That awareness keeps me alive, keeps me on the right path. I wouldn't like to do anything that is harmful to my ancestors, to my children, to my grandchildren. That is love.

I have many children and grandchildren—many disciples, monastics and lay. I know if I am not mindful, they will suffer so much. So every step I make is for them. Every breath I take is for them. I should nourish myself with peace, with joy, for the sake of my ancestors, for the sake of my children and their children. Every step I make, every breath I take, is the practice of love. That is why we distribute the sticker, “I walk for you.” So it is your duty to make a step in a relaxing way to feel that you are alive. It is a privilege to be alive, to be still walking on this beautiful planet, to touch peace and love within ourselves. One step is very much, because if you are able to make one step, you will be able to make two, and so on. I walk for you. I walk for my parents, my ancestors. Many people have brought their stickers home and continued their practice.

I have said that the practice should help us to recognize the seed of mindfulness in us and help it to manifest in our breathing, in our walking, in our eating, in our conversation and so on. In the Buddhist tradition, mindfulness is the substance of a Buddha. The Buddha is not something vague, a god, or just one person. The Buddha is the energy of mindfulness that is inherent in every one of us and we can make the Buddha in us grow apparent, strong. That light can shine on our life and help us to go in the direction of love, the direction of understanding.

The training here helps increase the capacity to be mindful. Yes, you are capable of being mindful, but we want you to increase that capacity. Every time you drink water and juice and tea, we want you to drink in mindfulness, not just from time to time. Every time you walk, we want you to walk mindfully, not just from time to time. The Sangha is here to remind you, to support you. During the time that you are here with your Sangha, please use the opportunity to really practice. Whether you go from your tent to the bathroom or to the kitchen or to

the meditation hall, adopt only one style of walking, walking meditation. Take more time and enjoy the walking.

In Plum Village, the monks and the nuns, all of them sign a treaty with their stairs. In your home there may be stairs, because you go up to sleep there and then in the morning you go down. There are days when you have to go up and down your stairs several times. When you sign a treaty with the stairs, you want to go up and go down only with peaceful, mindful steps. I have a hermitage very close to here and there are stairs. In 18 years I always go up and go down mindfully, enjoying every step. Never I have betrayed my treaty, violated my treaty. It has helped me. Now I can climb the Gridhrakuta Mountain, I can climb the Wu Tai Shan Mountain. I can climb any mountain, and everywhere I walk, including railway stations and airports, I walk in the same style: walking meditation, enjoying every step. I have quit running.

After signing that treaty, you have to respect it. Halfway up the stairs if you realize that you have not been walking mindfully, stop and go down again. Begin anew, breathing in, a step, and breathing out, another step, enjoying. It is very important. If you don't have stairs, then you can sign a treaty with a distance: for instance, the path that leads from your house to the bus station. You make a vow: from your house to that place you always walk mindfully. And if halfway you know that you have made unmindful steps, you go back. You walk again. Don't make it too long, to begin with. You will see the wonderful effect of such a practice on your life. Some years later you will find that you are walking the same way everywhere. You do that not only for yourself; no, you do it for all of us, for your children, for your ancestors, also.

There are many, many pleasant ways of doing it. There are several gathas like the one we sang here this morning. There are many wonderful gathas in Plum Village. Please learn them from your dharma teachers, from your brothers and sisters in the dharma. And practice with several gathas instead of just one. Like when you breathe in, you make two steps, "flower, flower"; and when you breathe out, you make another two steps, "fresh, fresh." Or if you want to go faster, you make three steps: "flower, flower, flower; fresh, fresh, fresh." But don't do it mechanically. Don't say the word—practice it. When you say, "flower, flower, flower," you have to be a flower. When you say "fresh, fresh, fresh," you have to make freshness into a reality. Otherwise, what are you doing?

After a few minutes, you may change to "mountain, solid." Breathing in, you say, "mountain, mountain," and you transform yourself into a mountain. You are walking with dignity. Each step is stability. You are not running. There are animals who walk like that, very majestically. The Buddha, also, he walked like



that. The monks and the nuns during the time of the Buddha used to hold a begging bowl and they walked like that. They radiate peace. People who saw them, many of them knelt down on the sidewalk, because people need this kind of stability and peace. So when you walk like this, you generate the energy of peace and stability within you and you inspire all of us. If it happens that I lose my awareness and I get into a hurry and I see you walking like that, your sight will be a bell of mindfulness bringing me back to myself and there I am walking beautifully again. That is why every one of us should make a contribution to the Sangha by his way or her way of walking and listening to the bell. Together we generate a powerful source of mindfulness that will penetrate into every one of us.

When I first came to America, I heard people say that a retreat should have no more than 30 people; otherwise it would not be serious. I didn't believe that too much, because I knew that if everyone in the retreat is mindful and if you combine the mindfulness of a large number of people, it will be very powerful. Everyone who happens to be there will be penetrated by the tremendous amount of energy emanating from the crowd. There were times when we practiced walking meditation with two thousand two hundred people in America. The people who came for the Day of Mindfulness had been in retreats and their practice was quite solid. There was no noise at all; there was no disorder at all. Everyone was walking mindfully, and it was very powerful. The energy penetrated each of us.

So if all of us, 300 or 400, know how to enjoy walking, generating stability and joy, then the collective energy will be powerful and every one of us will inherit, will profit from, that kind of energy. Each of you is needed. We need your contributions to the collective energy of the Sangha and walking mindfully, breathing mindfully, drinking mindfully, doing things mindfully is the way to do it. That practice helps increase the capacity to be mindful in us and in the people around us. Also, the practice in Plum Village helps to increase the capacity to keep mindfulness alive. Yes, all of us are capable of being mindful, but our mindfulness vanishes very quickly. We need the Sangha to keep our mindfulness alive for a longer time.

When you are mindful, concentrated, you are a Buddha. But many of us are part-time Buddhas only. We have to learn how to be a full-time Buddha, and that is our path. The old energy always pushes us in the opposite direction—forgetfulness. In order to counter that old energy, you have to create a new habit energy, the habit energy of being mindful. A very nice way, there is no war. There is only a transformation. Meditation is not a fight, even against the old habits, the negative things. To meditate means to embrace the negative. But you

need to have something in order to embrace: what is embracing what? It is the new habit, it is the new energy generated in you, that would be the agent, which embraces the old habit.

In the first dharma talk given here, I said that the old habit energy is very strong. Many times we did not want to do it, many times we did not want to say it. We knew that if we said it, if we did it, it would cause damage. But finally we did it, we said it. We regret it very much later on. We are determined that next time we will not do it, we will not say it, but when the circumstances arise we do it again, we say it again. It has caused a lot of damage within us. We are frustrated because we have the feeling that it is stronger than us, in fact it is stronger. Because our mindfulness is too weak. That is why we come together and practice touching the seed of mindfulness, helping it grow, learning how to increase our capacity of being mindful, our capacity of keeping our mindfulness alive. When we have that energy, we have something with which to embrace those old bad habits, the negative things. And embracing them long enough, we will diminish the power of the negative. It is like the heat in the home. When we want to refresh the atmosphere in the home we turn the air conditioning on. The cool air isn't going to fight the hot air. The cool air comes and embraces the hot air, and it makes the hot air cooler. But the important thing is that the cool air must be continually generated. You cannot turn it on and then turn it off. So you have to learn how to keep mindfulness alive for a longer period of time so your mindfulness can have enough time to embrace your forgetfulness, your negative habit energy, with tenderness, and not with an intention to fight.

Every time your habit energy shows itself, begins to manifest, thanks to our mindful breathing, mindful walking, you recognize it, and you smile at it. You say, "I know that you are there, I am taking good care of you," and you embrace it. That's our practice: no fighting. You should know that we are not responsible for the habit energy all by ourselves. Many of these habits have been transmitted. Some of them have been transmitted by our mother or by our father, and when we see that energy coming up we can say, "Hello Mother, I know you are there. I will take good care of you." Then you are in good hands again. Mindfulness is the Buddha. The Buddha is taking care of you. Don't worry. You know how to invite the Buddha, and to keep him, keep her, with you. The techniques of walking, of breathing, of doing things mindfully, is what we learn while being in Plum Village.

We have to know a little bit about ourselves in order for the practice to be easy and natural, and according to the teaching of the Buddha we are made of five elements. There is a teacher of mathematics who trained here who went back to Toronto. When he resumed his classes, he wiped the board with mindfulness,

slowly and peacefully. His students were very surprised. They asked him, "Are you OK, Daddy?" because he was very much in a hurry before. He turned around and said, "No, I'm OK, I'm trying to do it mindfully." I was wiping the board in mindfulness and his image appeared again to me.

Suppose we draw a circle here representing something like an orange, and suppose that the orange has five sections. So this is the first section, the second one, the third one, the fourth and the fifth. The first section of the orange represents our body, our form, *rupa*. Meditation has to do with our body. There are many sutras, many scriptures, about how to meditate on our body. The second section of the orange represents our feelings. To meditate is also to observe our feelings, to take care of our feelings, and we have to learn how. In Plum Village, we don't learn Buddhism; we learn only how to practice well.

Then we have our perceptions. To meditate is to become mindful of the perceptions, to look deeply into the perceptions, in order to see their nature. Mindfulness is intervening to shine light upon our perceptions. Many times our perceptions are wrong and mindfulness helps us to see that they are wrong. When we know that a perception is wrong, we are liberated. It is like when in twilight you see a snake, you get scared, you run, you scream, and when a friend brings a torch, you recognize that it's not a snake. It is only a piece of rope. That is a wrong perception. Wrong perceptions always create anger, fear, distress, and so on. That is why meditating on perceptions helps to dissipate a lot of suffering.

Mental formation is the fourth section of the orange. "Formation" is a technical term: it means things that are made by different elements, like this flower is a formation. If we look deeply into the flower, we see many components, like the rain, the sunshine, the clouds, the soil, the minerals, the farmer, the gardener, and so on. When something is made from different kinds of elements, that something manifests itself as the object of our perception, and it is called a formation. All formations are impermanent. Here we have business with mental formations. Fear is a mental formation. Craving is a mental formation. Compassion is also a mental formation. Love is a mental formation. There are many wholesome mental formations; there are unwholesome mental formations. In my tradition we distinguish fifty-one categories of mental formations. As a novice I had to learn them by heart: wholesome mental formations, unwholesome mental formations, and so on.

I have to tell you that feeling is also a mental formation, and perception is also a mental formation, but they are too important. That is why you have to single them out as a category. This kind of analysis is not for the sake of analysis. This analysis is for the sake of practice. You have to remember that if in the teaching

of the Buddha there is an analysis, the analysis is to help you to see and to practice well. It does not mean that this is the only way to present reality. No. Buddhism is not there to give you the only way, the only description of reality. The teachers are there to help you to understand yourself and to practice well.

So feeling is one of the fifty-one mental formations, perception is another one, therefore this category has only forty-nine mental formations. These mental formations don't manifest all at the same time. If they do, I think we cannot be alive. Imagine the television set and every channel manifests at the same time: not possible. So just one or two, sometimes three, but I think three is the maximum. This section of the orange represents something like the screen of our television, or the screen of the computer. Let us use the image of the computer. So each program appears on the screen of the computer, and you can bring some other things up to intervene. You can make a window; you can paste something in, for instance. If I lived in the time of the Buddha I could not give a dharma talk like this because they would not know what a computer is! So when they don't manifest, where are they? They must be somewhere, hidden somewhere, in order to manifest one by one like that. That is why we need the fifth section of the orange. It's called "consciousness."

Consciousness here means the lower part of our consciousness. In the Sarvastivada school it is called the base consciousness, the consciousness of the base. In Mahayana Buddhism we call it "store consciousness" because it has the capacity to store all the mental formations so that each of them will be able to manifest later as a mental formation.

I spoke to you at the beginning of the Dharma talk about this section of the orange: consciousness as the soil of the mind, containing all kinds of seeds. Each mental formation stays there in the form of a seed. A seed means something that has not manifested yet. That is the technical term "*bija*," seeds. So your anger is there in the form of a seed. Now you are not angry at anyone, you are fine, but that does not mean that anger is not in you. It is in you, but in the form of a seed only. You may think that anger is not in you, but that is not correct. If someone comes and says something, and touches that seed of anger, you will see that seed manifests itself and you will soon be overwhelmed by the energy of anger.

So *bija* is the seed, and we have all kinds of seeds in us, positive and negative. We have the seed of perfect enlightenment in us that is the Buddha-to-be in us. We have the seed of Mara in us. We have the seed of holiness in us, and we have the seed of un-holiness in us. So sometimes we may be called "His Holiness," sometimes "His Un-holiness." The mind is a screen upon which every mental formation can be revealed. A good practitioner knows how to keep the negative

seeds here [in the storehouse consciousness], and tries by his or her practice to help the positive seeds to manifest. If the positive seeds continue to manifest here, the negative seeds become smaller, smaller, less important. When they are tiny, not important, it is difficult for them to manifest. I don't get angry very often. Even when I get angry, you might not see it. You may say, "I have never seen Thây angry," and you believe anger is not in me. That is not true. The seed of anger is always in me, but since I practice I don't give it a lot of chance.

You also have to see things in terms of inter-being. When you practice do not entertain the hope that you will wipe out all the negative things in you. Please don't! It's like a gardener. She only wants to have flowers and no garbage in her garden. But it is a necessity for a flower to become garbage. You cannot keep a flower alive forever and ever. There will be a time when a flower has become a piece of garbage. The love in us can be like that, is like that too. But a good organic gardener is not afraid of garbage, because she knows perfectly how to transform the garbage back into flowers. Both flowers and garbage are made of organic matter. Mental formations are also organic. This is very interesting: all our mental formations are of an organic nature. That is why we can transform. Love can be transformed into hate. But if you have hate, don't be afraid. Learn, learn how to transform your hate back into flowers. Many couples after two, three years living together, see that their love has transformed into hate. In the beginning, "How can I survive without her?" But now, "How can I survive with her?"

So love has transformed into hate. But if we know the law of transformation, we know also that it is possible for us to transform garbage back into flowers. The hate, anger, if we know how, we can transform them. So may I urge you not to be afraid of your sorrow, your pain, your afflictions. Don't be eager to throw them away, because it is exactly with these materials that you can fabricate the flower of understanding and love in you. That is the principle of non-duality that is so important in the Buddhist tradition. An organic gardener is not afraid of the heap of garbage. She is confident. She does not want to throw the garbage away because she knows that she is capable of transforming the garbage back into flowers, into lettuce, cucumbers. So smile to them, say "I know you are there, I am going to take good care of you and make you into flowers." Don't throw anything away.

So day is because night is. Enlightenment and affliction, they inter-are. It is like the lotus. Although they are fragrant, beautiful, refreshing, all of them grow from the mud. But they don't smell like mud. That is why the Buddhists like very much to use the symbol of the lotus. You live in the world of afflictions, of suffering, and yet you are able to make use of them, to transform them. You live

in the world, but you are not overwhelmed or affected by the world. Instead you can help the world to transform.

If you live in a couple, if you live in a family, if you live with another person or several persons, you may ask them to be careful. You may ask them to be aware of the seeds you have in your store consciousness. "Darling, I know that I have these negative seeds in me. And every time these seeds manifest, I make myself suffer and I make you suffer, also. So, please, if you love me, if you care for me, be careful not to water these seeds in me." Among lovers, there should be such an agreement. That is the practice. "Darling, if you really love me, water the positive seeds in me, because I do have the seeds of understanding, of compassion, of forgiveness, of joy in me. Even if they are still small, if you know how to touch them in me every day, I become a much happier person and when I am happy, you don't have to suffer as much."

If you really understand what your store consciousness is, you understand yourself. If you understand the person you love with her weaknesses and her strengths, you would know what we call the practice of selective watering of seeds. Refrain from watering the negative seeds in him. Try your best to identify and to water the positive seeds in him every day, and you will see the situation will improve in just one week. The degree of happiness will increase very quickly, especially when you are supported by brothers and sisters within the practice to show you the way.

Consciousness sometimes is called *sarva bijaka*. "Bija" means seeds and "sarva" means all, all seeds. This is the totality of the seeds that are in you, the consciousness of the totality of the seeds.

When you live mindfully, you will be able to identify each variety of seeds that is about to manifest. When there is a stimuli and a seed is about to manifest, you know already and you immediately begin the practice of mindful breathing and walking. Stop everything else. This is very important. If you don't, the seed will manifest. When the seed manifests it is still possible for you to practice, but it is better that you practice when it is about to manifest. If you can do that it means that you have been practicing mindful walking, mindful breathing for several weeks. When a seed is about to be agitated, to be watered, you know and you put yourself in a state of being alert and you practice. You practice for you, yes, but you practice for him, for her. She will be grateful for you because you know how to take care of yourself, because taking care of yourself is to take care of him or her.

"I walk for you, I breathe for you." Selective watering of seeds is your practice and it does not take a long time. You can transform your situation very quickly.

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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# We Are the Continuation of Our Ancestors

By Thich Nhat Hanh

Good morning my dear friends.

Today is the twenty-first of July 1997. We are in the Upper Hamlet. I have a picture of me as a baby monk I want to share, to show you, especially the young people. I was seventeen. And then I have a picture of mine when I was sixteen. You see the difference after one year of practice. I have to tell you that I was a novice practicing with other novices and I had a great time. I was a very happy novice. I think it is very important to be happy when you are a novice because if you are happy as a novice, you will be happy as a monk. So you might like to pass it around and look closely at the baby monk. Maybe we'll have to print several copies for the children.

A few years ago there was a reporter. He is of American origin, but he lives in Denmark. He is a filmmaker, also. He came to my hut and interviewed me with his big, huge camera. One of the questions he asked is this, "Thay, if today the Buddha and Jesus met on the street, what do you think they would tell each other?" And this is my answer. "There is no if, because they are meeting each other every day. They are telling each other many things. Because you don't look deeply, you don't listen deeply, that is why you have not seen them meeting every day and exchanging every day." I said that because in my mind it is clear that the Buddha is here and Jesus is also here.

We are the continuation of the Buddha and of Jesus. The son is always the continuation of the father. Everyone has to agree upon this fact. Scientist or nonscientist, theologian or non-theologian, they have to accept the fact that the son, the daughter, is the continuation of the father and also the mother. In fact, they are the father and the mother. So it is absurd to say, "I don't want to have anything to do with my father."



There are people who get angry with their father and make the declaration, "I don't want to have anything to do with him." That would be impossible, because he, whether he wants or not, he is the continuation of his father. He is his father. That is why the only thing for him to do is to practice reconciliation within. Because his father is within him, there is no way of getting rid of his father. There are people who are angry with their mother, and they feel the same. They want to forget her. They don't want to have anything to do with her. Is that possible? No. They are the continuation of their mothers. They are their mothers. They cannot escape. That is why the practice is to go back and to reconcile with the mother within and with the father within.

We have blood parents, we have blood ancestors; but we have also our spiritual parents, our spiritual ancestors. The Buddha is my spiritual ancestor. I was born from him. I am his continuation. I am him. Later on in life I have adopted Jesus as another spiritual ancestor. In me they are alive. I do not have any conflict with them as I do not have any conflict with my blood parents and ancestors. This is a very important practice.

I am the Buddha and you are the Christ, because I am the continuation of the Buddha and you are the continuation of Jesus Christ. And we are seeing each other every day and we are talking with each other every day. And, it's silly to say, "If today the Buddha and the Christ met each other, what would they say to each other?" They have to meet each other. They have to say things to each other every day, because that is also for the sake of peace. If people of different religious affiliations do not see each other, do not meet each other, do not talk to each other, then peace will not be possible. So, I told the reporter that they are meeting every day and I wish them success.

Now, children, let's listen to this. You might wonder whether the Buddha is a person or where he is, because in the drawings you make and give to me you like to draw the Buddha. Where is the Buddha now? How can we touch him, see him and talk to him? Is he a he or maybe a she? Is there one Buddha only, or are there many Buddhas? These are very interesting questions and you have to ask yourself and to ask your friends.

There is a Buddha whose name is Shakyamuni, and I have adopted him as a teacher, but I know that besides him there are many other Buddhas. And there are part time Buddhas, there are full time Buddhas. We have to get rid of the idea that the Buddha is a god. No, the Buddha is not a god. The Buddha may be a human being like you and I. But the Buddha may be a deer or a squirrel. Because anyone, anything that is animated by Buddha nature can be described as Buddha. Buddha nature, what is it? Buddha nature in Sanskrit is *Buddhata*.

Buddha nature is inherent in every one of us, not only humans, but nonhumans as well.

I'd like to tell you about the Buddha nature that is in us. It is like electricity. I believe that electricity is. There is such a thing as electricity because I have seen electricity manifested in many forms. In the dark, you turn on the light and you have light. That is a manifestation of electricity, right? It is very hot, and you turn on the fan, and you have the wind. Well, that wind is made by electricity, so electricity is seen in the form of the wind. And when you open your refrigerator to take some ice cream, you see that the cold in there, the capacity to retain the cold, to keep your ice cream not melting, that is also electricity. When you drive your car, if the car can run like that it means electricity is there. There is something that can help generate electricity and that electricity can propel your car or your airplane.

I know that electricity exists because I have seen light, I have seen the wind, I have seen the cold, I have seen the force driving the car. You cannot say that electricity is just the light, or electricity is just the wind. No. So, Buddhahood, Buddha nature, can be seen in a person like Shakyamuni but Buddha nature can be seen in other forms. You yourself, you have the Buddha nature in you. If you know how to touch it, if you know how to nurture it, then the Buddha nature will manifest in you and you have more peace, more joy, more stability, more freshness. That is why to practice meditation is to touch the Buddha nature in you and to help it manifest so that you feel much better. That is why I have offered you the practice of pebble meditation.

Yesterday I talked about what you can give. First of all, I said the most precious thing you can give to the people you love is your true presence. In order to be truly present, you have only to breathe in and breathe out and become fresh like a flower. And you go to her, go to him, the person you love, and say, "Darling, I'm really here for you." This is a gift. I also said that you have to offer your freshness. In order to be fresh, you know what to do. Relax, breathe in, breathe out, smile. Put down your worry, your anger, and you become fresh. That is something you can offer to people you love.

There is a young practitioner among us and his name is Bao-tich and he is four years old, or four years young. He just celebrated his fourth birthday a few days ago and he has a very nice practice. Every time he gets agitated, his mother invites him to sit like a Buddha. My dear little boy, it does not seem that the Buddha nature in you is so evident. So, would you like to sit down in the lotus position and practice breathing and smiling so that the Buddha will come back into your heart? And Bao-tich always listens to his mother, and practices sitting

down. He sits very beautifully and after a few minutes, he says, "Mommy, touch me to see whether the Buddha is already clear." And his mother will touch him and say, "It begins to be clear, so continue sitting for another minute." So after Bao-tich has become still and serene and peaceful, his mother will touch him again and say, "Now the Buddha in you is very clear, so go and play, my darling." So Bao-tich is very glad and runs and plays again. He is there. He promised that next year he will speak English.

I would like you to practice the same. You may recuperate the Buddha nature in you very quickly. We have made a song for you to practice. "Flower - Fresh. Mountain - Solid. Water - Reflecting. Space - Free." You need only to use four of your pebbles—one pebble for Flower; one pebble for Mountain; one pebble for Water; and one pebble for Space. This can be practiced with music.

Suppose this is the pebble for Flower. You put it on the palm of your hand and you practice breathing in, breathing out three times with the flower in mind. "Breathing in, I see myself as a flower." You do it in such a way that you become a real flower. It is not difficult: if you want to be a flower, you will be a flower. Relax. Smile. Smile with your eyes. Smile with your mouth. Smile with your ears. Smile with your body. You can do it. "Breathing in, I see myself as a flower." In fact, we are all flowers. Human beings are a kind of flower. If you don't look exactly like a flower it is because you have not taken good care of yourself, you have cried too much, you have dried yourself up. You have allowed sorrow and worry to enter you and destroy you. So, recuperate. Restore your flower-ness. This is one of the ways to do it. "Breathing in, I see myself as a flower." This is not imagination. You are a flower. You have the right to recuperate your flower-ness.

There are many of us when we grow old—sixty, seventy, eighty—we are able to retain our flower-ness. Congratulations to you who are able to do so. I have seen people eighty, ninety, still very fresh. We have to admire these people. We have to follow their example. We have to learn from them how to retain our flower-ness. "Breathing in, I see myself as a flower. Breathing out, I feel fresh. You know, a flower does not seem to do anything, but without flowers, life would seem very sad. So you don't have to do anything. If you can be a flower, you serve the world. "Breathing out I feel fresh." You do that three times, you pick up the pebble and you put it on your right.

Now you pick up another pebble. This pebble's name is Mountain. You know that stability is very important. A stable child, a stable adult, can inspire people and make them happy. Stability is very important. The image of the mountain can help you to practice. "Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain." Nothing can

assault me. If you have a stable position for your body, if you know how to sit erect; if you know how to enjoy your in-breath and out-breath, and become the master of yourself, then any provocation, any sorrow, anything you imagine cannot shake you. So you stay solid like a mountain.

“Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain. Breathing out, I feel solid.” Solid as a mountain, that is our practice. You learn to be solid in your sitting position and then you will learn to be solid in your way of walking. You will be solid in your way of driving. You will be a solid driver. When you cook your dinner, you can practice your solidity, also. Three times. “Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain. Breathing out, I feel solid.” And you put aside the second pebble.

Now you pick up the third pebble. The name of the third pebble in this practice is Still Water. Not just water, still water. There are times when you look at the water you see it very still. So still you can see the blue sky and the white clouds in it. You can see the trees reflected in it, exactly like up there. If you have a camera, you just aim at the surface of the lake and take the picture. When you develop it people might think that you took it from up there because the image is so faithful. So when your mind is calm, still like that water, you will reflect everything as it is. You don't distort things. You don't have wrong perceptions; because wrong perceptions make you angry, make you suffer.

The Buddha said wrong perceptions are the ground of all our suffering. The other person does not want to destroy us but we still think that she is trying to destroy us. The other person is not trying to make us suffer, but we believe that his intention is to punish us. When we see a piece of rope in the twilight, we might think that it is a snake, but it is not a snake. In the twilight, you are walking and suddenly you see a snake. You scream and you run away. When your friend brings in a torch, you realize that it is not a snake at all. It is only a piece of rope. That is what we call a wrong perception. A wrong perception always makes us suffer and that is why we have to learn to see things as they are and not distort them. It is very important to practice being calm like still water because still water can reflect things as they are. Breathing in, I see myself as still water. Breathing out, I reflect things as they truly are.

Lastly, freedom, space. “Breathing in, I see myself as space. Breathing out, I feel free.” People who have space within don't suffer. People who have space around them, they don't suffer. It's like the moon. Look at the moon traveling in the empty sky. It has a lot of space around it. The moon is serene, happy. But we, sometimes, we don't have space inside. We are full of worries, of anger, of fear, of projects, of desire. We don't allow ourselves to have space inside, and there is no space outside at all. We don't feel that we have the time. We don't feel that we

have space to move around. What kind of life are we having? When we love someone, we love in such a way that we no longer have any time, any space and we deprive the person we love of space and time, and love becomes a prison for us and for the other person. That is not true love. If you love someone and if that someone isn't capable of moving any more, that's not love. So space is a very big gift. You have to offer him space if you want him to be truly happy. Offering him space inside. Offering him space outside around him. This is a very important practice. We will learn how to put more space inside and to arrange so that we have plenty of space around us. That is very crucial for our happiness.

"Breathing in, I see myself as space. Breathing out, I feel free."

Many people in their lives buy a lot of ropes and tie themselves up and finally, they cannot move. First they think that these ropes are very much needed for their happiness. I would not be happy if I don't have that rope. The rope of fame. The rope of wealth. There are many kinds of ropes. I would not be happy if I could not buy that rope. So we buy all kinds of ties. Not only one to put around our necks but several kinds of ties to put around our bodies, our feelings, our perceptions and finally we can no longer move. We have no space. Happiness is impossible. That is why we have to practice to free ourselves and to put into ourselves a lot of space and around us also. This is a technique of liberation.

"Breathing in, I see myself as space. Breathing out, I feel free."

During the practice we develop our flower-ness. We develop our solidity. We develop our calm, stillness and we develop our freedom. These qualities combined together we call Buddha nature. If Bao-tich sits still, that means he wants to recuperate, to restore some of his Buddha nature so that he becomes more calm, more joyful, more loving. All of you can do like him and also, even better, you can become like a Buddha. So the Buddha is not something outside. The Buddha may be a person like Shakyamuni. But the Buddha nature should be in you and if you practice well you can touch that Buddha nature in you and you will develop your flower-ness, your solidity, your freedom and your stillness.

Let us ask someone to sing "Breathing in, Breathing out" for us. Let us sit beautifully and practice. We don't sing with her. We just practice the song. And, I am doing the movements. If you like you can do the movements, but the movements are not enough. We have to breathe and become a real flower and to become a real mountain. When I breathe in, I see myself as a mountain; I really feel I am a mountain.

Breathing in, breathing out,  
Breathing in, breathing out,  
I am blooming as a flower,  
I am fresh as the dew.

I am solid as a mountain,  
I am firm as the earth,  
I am free.

Breathing in, breathing out,  
Breathing in, breathing out,  
I am water, reflecting,  
What is real, what is true.

And I feel there is space  
Deep inside of me,  
I am free, I am free, I am free.

You see, meditation can be fun. There are many ways of practicing meditation, and you can meditate in music as well. Now I would like to offer Bao-tich, the young people, and the less young the practice of visiting the Buddha within. Don't think that this statue is the Buddha. It's made of clay only. We want the real Buddha. The real Buddha is made of these four elements: freshness, solidity, stillness and freedom. And you know that these elements are within. I like to touch the real Buddha and not the clay Buddha. A clay Buddha is sometimes helpful because it helps us to go home to touch the real Buddha.

You may sit down beautifully and you breathe in, breathe out a few times and you put your right hand on your heart and you say, "Hello, Little Buddha, are you there?" You ask first the question, "Hello, my little Buddha, are you there?" And you listen. You listen with all your heart. If you are too agitated, too troubled, you might not hear the little Buddha answering you very clearly. So you ask him for the second time, "Hello, little Buddha, are you there?" If you pay attention, you will hear his voice or her voice, "Yes, I am here." But it may not be very clear. The voice of the Buddha becomes clearer and clearer as you become calmer and more solid. You may ask for the third time, "Hello, little Buddha are you there?" And you listen. This time the Buddha's voice is very clear, "Yes, surely, I am always there for you."

Remember the first mantra. The Buddha is practicing the first mantra. "I am always there for you, my darling." And then when you hear the voice of the Buddha in you, you say, "I am very glad. You are my freshness. You are my flower-ness." And the Buddha says, "Yes, I am your freshness, your flower-ness." Do try to cultivate your flower-ness. And then you say, "Dear Buddha, you are also my stability. You are a mountain in me." And you listen, and the Buddha says, "Yes, I am your stability. I am you solidity. I am the mountain in

you.” You hear it. You hear the Buddha answering you very clearly. Sometime if you speak English, the voice will be in English. If you speak German, the voice will be in German. I am sure, because that is your Buddha.

“Dear Buddha, you are my stillness, my calm, is that right?” And the Buddha says, “Yes, I am your stillness. I am your calm.” You become glad and you say, “Dear Buddha, you are my freedom. You are space within me and around me.” And the Buddha in you will say, “Yes. I am your freedom. I am space in you and surrounding you. And you say, “Dear little Buddha, I am very glad that you are there for me.” And the Buddha says, “Yes. I am always there for you. I am glad that you visit. Come and visit often.” You say, “Dear Buddha, I need you very much. Without you, I would suffer.” And the Buddha says, “Yes, I will try my best to be with you all the time, and I also need you. If you visit me often, I will be clearer. I will be more apparent and I can help you better.”

Visiting the Buddha at least once a day is important. If you get agitated several times a day, it is very important to visit your Buddha several times a day. This is the end of your Dharma talk. When you hear the bell, stand up, bow to the Sangha and go out to continue your learning and practice.

[Bell, the children leave]

My dear friends, it is very important to make a connection with our ancestors and the future generations. Alienation is a kind of sickness. There are people who don't feel they are connected with anything at all and they suffer from being cut off, from loneliness. There is no understanding. There is no love that can nourish them. Therefore, to practice restoring the connection is very important.

I always feel that I am the continuation of my ancestors. Every day I practice touching my ancestors. In my country every home has an altar for ancestors, blood ancestors and spiritual ancestors. An altar is just a table, but it is very important. You place that table in the central part of your house and you focus your attention on the table as the point of contact between you and your ancestors. Usually every morning we come and offer some incense to our ancestors. Our ancestors do not need to smell incense, but we want to light a stick of incense to our ancestors because the practice of lighting incense focuses our attention on the presence of our ancestors. During the time you strike the match, you light the stick of incense, you offer the incense on the table, you have an opportunity to touch your ancestors within yourself. You realize that your ancestors are always alive in you because you are the continuation of your ancestors.

In your sitting meditation you can practice like this, “Daddy, I am your son. I am your daughter.” That is a fact. You know it so well, but you don’t feel it sometimes. You feel that your father is one person and you are another person. But in fact that is not so. You are a very real continuation of your father. It is like the plant of corn is the continuation of the seed of corn. Although the statement is very simple, you have to perceive it, to feel it, to live the reality of it. “Daddy, I am your daughter, I am your son.” No matter how hard it is for you to make the statement, you have to make it because that is the truth. Even if between you and your father there is a lot of difficulty, you still are his continuation. You are still him. All the sufferings that he endured may be still in you, and it is up to you to work for the transformation. If you are able to transform the suffering in you, you have your father in you; you practice for both of you.

Maybe when you were young, you suffered so much already you are determined to be very different from your father. You will never do what he has done to you. You were so determined, and yet because you don’t know how to transform the energies that has been transmitted by him to you, when you grow up, you have the tendency to behave exactly like he did. That is called the wheel of *samsāra*, the vicious circle. We know we hate that. We don’t want to do it, but we still continue to do exactly that. We make our children our partners suffer also.

The habit energy is transmitted from generation to generation. The only way is to recognize that you are just the continuation of your father, your mother; you are him, you are her, and you are determined to practice to liberate you, to liberate him at the same time. That is your blood ancestor. Your ancestors have transmitted to you many positive seeds, but also many negative seeds. It is up to you to practice to develop the positive seeds and to diminish and to transform the negative seeds. The essential is to learn how to do it, learning from the Dharma, learning from the Sangha.

We know that the practice here is to cultivate mindfulness to be able to recognize the tendency, the habit energy, every time it begins to show itself. Not fighting, not suppressing, but just recognizing and embracing it with the energy of mindfulness so that it will not continue its course of destruction. If you allow it to go on its way, there will be damage done to you and to the people you love. You did not want to say that, you did not want to do that, but you said that, you did that anyway because you don’t know how to take care of that habit energy. That is why there must be continued practice in order to generate the energy of mindfulness for the recognition and transformation of this habit energy.

And then there are your children and your grandchildren, your blood children. You know that they have inherited some of your habit energies. The habit



energies you have received from your ancestors and also have transmitted to them. In each cell in your body you can find everything. Each cell of our body contains all the habit energies of all generations of ancestors.

You have heard of the techniques of cloning, and now we are in a position to be able to clone humans. They just take one cell and arrange to have that cell be in a position to reproduce another you. And that once again proves the teaching of the Buddha to be very close to the scientific findings of our times, that one contains the all. That is the teaching of the *Avatamsaka*, that one contains the all. So one cell in our body can contain the whole universe, can contain all our former generations, our ancestors. So you have transmitted all of that to your children and grandchildren. You don't know. It's very quick. But you have transmitted millions and millions of things to them in just one second or less. The positive and the negative at the same time you have transmitted. You are a link between your ancestors and your children. You have received and you have transmitted. You know that your children, if they are lucky, they will meet someone to help them to nourish the positive things and to transform the negative things. Otherwise, they'll carry you very far into the future without any chance of transformation and healing.

If you have the chance to practice, to do the work of transformation and healing, you may be able to help your child, your children, your grandchildren to do so. Because, if you are the continuation of your ancestors, your children are a continuation of you and you help link your children with your ancestors. You help your ancestors to link with your children.

The same thing is true with our spiritual ancestors. When I teach a young monk or a young nun or a young lay person, I always have the image that that young person is going to continue me and to continue my spiritual ancestors. So that the main thing for me to do is to transmit the best things I have received from my spiritual ancestors, only. I survive with my disciples. They will be my continuation. That is why I focus so much attention and energy and time and love toward the teaching, because that is the only way to be kind to my ancestors' transmission, transmitting the best.

There are two ways. My disciples, my students, are my continuation. My student, my disciple needs me to get connected with his or her spiritual ancestors. In me I carry the Buddha, the patriarch, my teachers and it is that sense of the Buddha, the patriarch, the teachers that I transmit to my disciples. So, my disciple needs me to get linked with all the ancestors. I serve as the link. And I need my disciple to get linked with the future generations, because without him, without her, the best things I received from my ancestors will not

be transmitted. I rely on my disciples to continue the lineage and to transmit the best things from the lineage of ancestors down to further generations. We need each other. My disciple needs me to get linked with all spiritual ancestors and I need him or her to continue me, and ancestors in the future. We need each other. This should be true with our blood family also.

When you practice meditation, which means to practice looking deeply into yourself, you see that your ancestors are still there in you. They are still there in you, alive, just because you are there. Look at this hand. You will say that this is my hand. Right, but not enough. This is also the hand of my mother. This is also the hand of my father. This is the hand of my ancestor. Remember when you were a small child. You had a fever and your mother came and she put her hand on your forehead, and felt so good. Your mother may have passed away, and you remember that lovely hand, that gentle hand, and you miss it. Still, if you look deeply into your hand, you see this is also your mother's hand. "Breathing in, I know this is also the hand of my mother. Breathing out, the hand of my mother is on my forehead." So, the hand of your mother is still available at any time. The hand of your father, the hand of your ancestors is always available, because your hand is there.

The idea of me and mine may be an obstacle. Yes, there is me, there is mine, but this is also him and his, her and hers. That is the fruit of the practice of looking deeply. This hand is also the hand of the Buddha. These feet are also the feet of the Buddha, because without the Buddha, I would not be able to make peaceful steps on this planet and to get the nourishment I need and all of us need. Without the Buddha, without my teachers, how could I have been able to walk peacefully with stability, with freedom and solidity, and with joy? This foot is my foot. This foot is also my mother's, my father's and of the Buddha's. Where else do I have to go to find my mother, my father and the Buddha? No, I don't have to go anywhere. I just touch myself deeply and I touch them all. They are always alive in me.

If you practice like that, alienation will no longer be a problem. You think you are too alone. Everyone has let you down. No, that is not true. That is an imagination. That is an illusion. The Buddha is always with you and Jesus is always with you. Your ancestors are always with you, your children also. They are always with you. Touch yourself and you can already touch your children. When you contemplate a lemon tree in spring, although you don't see any lemons yet, you may see some lemon blossoms, but you know the lemons are already there. Because the lemon tree is there, the lemon blossom is there, the lemons are there as fruit. So, even if you are a young person, you are not married yet, but if you touch yourself deeply, you can already see your children and

grandchildren. A young monk, a young nun, who hasn't become a teacher, if he or she practices well, and she can touch herself and see already the presence of her disciples and grand disciples and great grand disciples in her. So, touching the present, you touch all the past and you touch all of the future, because the present moment includes all the past and all the future. If you touch one cell of your body, you touch all of your ancestors and you touch all your children and their grandchildren. This is the teaching of Lord Buddha, that one contains the many, touching the one deeply you touch the all. Touching the present moment, you touch infinity.

[Bell]

Whether you have some problems with your parents or not, I would propose that tonight in sitting meditation, you try this. "Breathing in, I know that I am the son of my father, or the daughter of my father." And we are not contented just with pronouncing the sentence. We have to see it. We have to see us as the true daughters of our fathers. We have to see the relationship, the oneness. You have only the time for an in-breath to visualize that, to touch the fact that you are truly his daughter, her daughter. If you don't succeed, try again. "Breathing in, I see myself; I know that I am your daughter." "Breathing out, I smile." I smile at the fact that I am your daughter, I am your son." Do it for a few times. Then, "Breathing in, I know I am your continuation. Breathing out, I know I am your continuation."

You don't need to imagine anything. You need only to touch reality as it is. Meditating does not mean dreaming, getting away from reality. To meditate means to touch reality as it really is, to touch such-ness. And then, "Breathing in, I know I am you, my father. Breathing out I know I am you, my father." Sometimes it is hard, but you have to succeed. Because that is true, hard fact. No one can demonstrate the opposite. "Breathing in, I know your difficulties, my father." You have to see his difficulties; you have to really see them. There were things he did not want to say, but he said it. There were things that he did not want to do to you, but he did it. You also have done it to your children, to your beloved ones, so why do you have to condemn, to blame your father? We are weak. We are overwhelmed with our difficulties, our problems; and we do things that we don't want to do. "Breathing in, I know, father, you have your difficulties," and try to see these difficulties.

If you begin to see the suffering, the difficulties of your father, or your mother especially, then naturally, compassion will be born in your heart, because you have learned that understanding creates love, compassion. Try to see the difficulties, the suffering that that person has endured in his childhood, in his

life, and that is the practice of looking deeply. If needed, you continue to practice for five, ten minutes or even fifteen; you have to succeed, because this is very important work. "Breathing in, I know there are things you wanted to do but you were not able to do." You had a dream, father, not fulfilled, and you want me to fulfill that dream for you.

A father always has dreams for his son or daughter. He was frustrated; he could not fulfill that dream that desire. Silently, unconsciously, he wants you to be able to do it. In the beginning, that desire is very strong. Later on, the suffering might cover-up the desire, but the desire is still alive. All fathers and mothers have that kind of desire. And you also. So you have to find out that kind of dream and desire, and you say, "Father, I'll do it for you." If your father did not have a chance to practice mindful breathing, mindful walking, to get the calm and the transformation, you will do it for him. If your mother did not have the chance, you'll do it for her. You practice for both. You practice for all of them, your ancestors. Cut through the wheel of *samsāra*. Do not allow it to make you go around. Don't allow it to be transmitted to your children, to your disciples, for your children are somehow your disciples.

Have you practiced touching the earth? Touching the earth may look like a ritual, but it is not necessarily a ritual. There are times when you lie down flat on the earth and you surrender everything. The earth is my mother. I surrender myself entirely to her. I have come from the earth and I will go back to the earth. Lie flat on the grass and be one with the earth. That is touching the earth. In Plum Village we practice the three earth touching's. The first one is to connect ourselves with our ancestors and with our children and their children. A vertical line. In the position of earth touching you have to get linked to your ancestors and to your children before you stand up. You might use all kinds of methods, like the one I just proposed to you, "Father, I am your daughter, I am your son. Father, I am your continuation; I am you. Ancestors, I am your continuation. Ancestors, father, I vow, I promise that I will try to do what you have not been able to do, to end all of these afflictions, frustrations and to open up for freedom and transformation."

When you bow down like that and touch your ancestors, you see that you have lost your identity as a separated existence. Why? Because you realize your position in the river of being. You are only a continuation. You are only a transition. Above you there are ancestors and below you there are children and grandchildren. So you become one with the river, and suddenly you lose your solitude of being a separated existence, because you know that you are your ancestors; you are your children. You become immortal.

First you might think that some of your ancestors are not to your liking. They made mistakes. They did wrong things. Yes, they made mistakes, they did wrong things; but they are your ancestors. Your parents are your youngest ancestors. They may have done wrong to you and to other people, but they are your ancestors, your parents. You, yourself, you are not perfect. You have done good things, yes, but you have done also wrong things: to you, to your ancestors and to your children. Who are you not to accept them as your ancestors, as your parents? The ancestors, I know, some of you are perfect. I can look up to as my example, but some of you were weak and have made mistakes, but I recognize all of you as my ancestors. Because in myself, I realize that I have strength and also weaknesses. I also make mistakes. I also make people suffer; so who am I not to accept you? So you accept your parents, you accept your ancestors. So you feel much better.

If you suffer because of your children: first you think that your children will do exactly what you tell them to do, but finally you find out that they have their own ideas, their own desires and they do things not to your liking at all. You feel a distance, a separation between you and them. Sometimes you say, they are not my children; my children are not like that. I do not recognize them as my children. My children must be like this, like this, like this. Parents have a tendency to think like that. But in fact, if we look into ourselves we say, "Sometimes I did things that did not please my parents. I have shortcomings within myself. I am not perfect. Why do I have to expect my children to be perfect?" So if you realize that you forgive your children, you will love them again, accept them again.

The first earth touching is very healing. After having touched your ancestors and accepting them entirely as your ancestors, you begin to touch your children and your grandchildren and realize that although they make mistakes and sometimes they are not very kind to you, but they are really and truly your children and your grandchildren. You have to allow them a chance—because you yourself, you want to have a chance for healing and transformation—so you get into good terms with your children again. I don't have blood children, but I have a lot of spiritual children, and I have to practice that way, too. I cannot expect my students to be perfect. Sometimes they make terrible mistakes but I continue to love them, to help them, to give them a chance. That is my practice. Only in that way can you help them. So if you have problems with your parents, if you have problems with your children, your grandchildren, this is the practice. Learn more. Practice diligently every day and learn more from your own practice. And after one week, two weeks, you'll feel much better. Peace will be in your heart and between you and them.

I can tell you that there are people who attended only one session of earth touching and get that transformation. They cry a lot, a lot, during the practice and after they feel very light and they connect again with their ancestors, their fathers, their mothers and their children. You may practice earth touching in many ways. Use your intelligence and creative ideas to practice. But the principle is to touch and to look deeply to see that you are only a continuation. You serve as a link between your ancestors and your children.

Now I would like to offer you the second earth touching. It is symbolized by a horizontal line. It has to do with living beings that are now around you. When you touch the earth for the second time, you practice to link with everyone who is alive in the present moment. People in your family, people in your society, people who are happy and people who are unhappy. You have to see the interconnection between you and all of them. In the process of the practice, you might suffer a little bit, but that suffering is very helpful.

First of all, you try to touch the great beings that are around you, *Mahasattvas*. The great beings are around you; if you know how to look mindfully you will see that you don't need to go back into the past to find them. They are around you. Great beings are *bodhisattvas*: mindful beings who have the capacity of being solid, being joyful, being compassionate. You know that around you there are such people—and you need to recognize them, that is very important.

There are those who are now among the poor and oppressed everywhere in the world who continue to work for the liberation, for the improvement of the life conditions of living beings. They work during the day; they work during the night. They encounter a lot of misery, oppression, pain. And yet, they can still retain their energy and hope. They don't give up because they have a large heart. They can endure, they can embrace, they can include. They are great beings. And don't think that they are in the sky; they are around us. There are those whose names we hear, but there are countless of them that are not known to you, but they are there. Not only Mother Theresa is one. We know a few names, but there are a multitude of them, a little bit everywhere in society. In this assembly there are many of them I know personally, because they are motivated by a great desire, not a desire to consume, to get famous, but a desire to serve, to help, and that energy in them makes them very happy. They are animated by that desire to help, to bring relief, to bring joy to people. They are *Mahasattvas*, great beings. They don't give up when they encounter difficulties. They continue. They have solidity in them. They have freshness in them. They have space in them. Even if the people they try to help shout at them, they can still smile. They don't get angry at them.

I know there are many nurses on their graduation holding a candle like this. They feel the vow to help patients as a source of tremendous energy in them, but they have not encountered the fact that the patients, the sick people, are sometimes very difficult to love. They are very demanding, very difficult at times. So these nurses who started with a very refreshing, strong desire to help sometimes have to withdraw. They were not trained in nursing school about *shanti paramita*, how to embrace, how to include, how to forbear. So in medical school, I think we have to learn the six *paramitas*, to learn how to open our heart to make it big in order for us to be able to embrace and not suffer. So great beings are those who are able to embrace, to include and not to suffer.

And we should be able to connect with them—very important for our support. Every time we think of them we feel the energy coming in again and that is why during the second prostration, the second touching of the earth, you have to be able to touch them. If you get to know some of them, personally, that would be very helpful and in the process of practice, to get to know more of them and you will get the comfort that many of them are out there. You get a strong source of support. So you fill yourself with a lot of energy and you become a great being yourself.

In the later part of the practice, you see you are one with oppressed people, with the people who suffer. You see yourself as a frog singing happily in a clear pond and you see yourself as a grass snake silently advancing in order to feed itself on the frog. You are the frog and you are the grass snake. You are the poor child in Uganda, having nothing to eat. Their legs are as thin as a bamboo stick. You are him but you are also the merchant of arms selling deadly weapons to Uganda. Our countries, America, France, Germany, produce everyday products, guns, to sell to these countries. We know that the little child does not need guns. They do need something to eat. We are that child, starving, and we are also the arms merchant who is trying to sell arms to Uganda. We have to be one with all who suffer. We are those who have to survive with drugs. And we are those who try to prevent the drugs from being brought into the country.

We are everyone. The suffering is immense. And we have to identify with all of them. And yet, we do not get drowned into the ocean of suffering because we have all the *bodhisattvas*, great beings, with us. Everyday we have to touch the earth in order to see that oneness, the interconnectedness between us and all these living beings. Out of that compassion will flow. We will know what to do and what not to do in order not to make the situation worse, to bring relief to the situation. I practice touching the earth every day. And I wish that my friends also would practice touching earth every day in order to get connected. When you get

connected, all of your mental problems, mental disease will vanish. You will no longer feel cut off and alienated from the world.

[Bell]

The third prostration, the third touching the earth, is represented by a circle and this consists of giving up ideas. You know that ideas make us suffer a lot, so we try to give up ideas. Like, your idea of happiness. You have one idea of happiness and you have to look deeply into that idea to see whether that idea of happiness has made you happy or has made you unhappy. That idea may be adopted by a nation. One nation may think that this the only way to get their country happy, the people happy, and then that country is committed to that idea, that ideology for fifty years, seventy years. And there is no happiness. And finally, they release the idea. It may be too late, but I don't think it's too late, because when you abandon the idea, you have a chance. You think in order to be truly happy you have to be this, to be that, to have this, to have that, and that is very dangerous. You are committed to one idea of how to be happy and you get stuck. Happiness can come from every direction. You have to allow yourself to be free, because you have many chances to be happy. Happiness can come in one or another form, several kinds of forms. If we are committed to only one idea of happiness, we lose a lot of chances. Have you thought of looking deeply into the nature of your idea of happiness? Maybe if you can abandon your idea of happiness, you will become happy very soon.

The third touching the earth is the practice of giving up ideas. There are many ideas to be given up and today we have a chance to consider only a few. This is very important in Buddhist teachings. First of all, this body is me. The idea that this body is me, is mine, is one that we have to get rid of. You can succeed very easily, because you have already practiced the first touching and the second touching. You have begun to see that this body is not your body. This body is the body of your ancestors as well and this body is the body of your children and grandchildren. The young people in the West, they make declarations that I cannot understand. They say that this is my body. I can do what ever I want with my body. I am free. I am adult. I am more than 18 years old, so I have the freedom to anything with my life, namely with my body. So, to use drugs to commit suicide, that is my right. But according to this teaching, you don't have that right. I think legislators have to think about this. I would plead with you, those who make legislation, to reconsider, because to my insight, this body is not me, is not mine. This body I have received from my ancestors, my parents, and I have to take good care of it. Otherwise, I betray my ancestors, I betray my parents. If I use drugs; if I use alcohol; if I destroy myself; if I commit suicide, I betray all my ancestors and my parents and I also betray my children and my



grandchildren. The laws in many countries supports the idea that I have sovereignty over this body. I don't think that this is a good insight. You have a duty to take good care of your body, to keep it healthy and to transmit it to your children and grandchildren. The law should be on that line of thinking.

The Buddha said, "This body is not me. I am not confined to this body. I am life without boundary." So when this body is no longer there, I continue because I am not this body. I am much larger than this body. I am my ancestors; I am my disciples; I am my friends. I have transmitted the best of me to them, so why do I have to stop to be? So the idea that this body is me, this life span is me, you have to remove. The idea that I was born on this date. On this date I began to be. And in the future, on such and such date, I will die I will stop being. Life span is an idea that we have to give up. Before this birth date I did not exist. And after this death date, I will no longer exist. I exist only from here to here—what an idea! The idea about a life span, the idea that this body is me. This life span is my life. Most of us are caught in that.

In fact, you are not bound to this body. You are not bound to birth and death. Your true nature is no-birth and no-death. And that is the best thing you can realize with Buddhist meditation. You have to touch your true nature of birth and death. The wave has to touch water. The wave has the right to be a wave, yes, but a wave has the right to be the water also. But if the wave knows she is water, she will not be upset anymore. She will not be afraid anymore of the so-called birth and death. So you think that from here to here you are and from here on, you are not. This is to be and this not to be. Who said, "To be or not to be, that is the question?" The Buddha said, "To be, or not to be, that is not the question!" The question is whether you know the nature of inter-being. So, the third prostration is very deep. It consists of releasing the idea of you are this body and this life span is the only time when you are, when you can be. Our ancestors are there alive. Our children are already there alive. This prostration, this touching the earth will help you touch the ultimate dimension, touch nirvana, touch the kingdom of God. Please train yourself. Practice more, learn more about the three prostrations and do them every day. You will release a lot of your pain, suffering and fear.

Today everyone is requested to participate in walking meditation. I will offer some instructions on walking meditation. We will gather around the linden tree, and there will be a microphone with which I can give some instructions on how to enjoy walking. Then after that we will participate in a formal meal, because today we want to show you how the monastics eat a meal during the retreat season. The monastics have at least one long retreat every year, called rain retreat, and in Plum Village we make the winter our three month retreat. Some of

you have been on winter retreat here in Plum Village. In Buddhist countries we always have this kind of formal meal, at noontime, during the rain retreat.

We will eat together in this hall, and we eat in such a way that the energy of the Sangha will penetrate into every one of us. We eat in silence. We focus our attention on the food and on the Sangha. We eat in such a way that peace and joy is possible and we have reduced the rituals to the minimum, but still you can see something. If you have learned, you know what to do when you fill your bowl with food, practicing breathing in, breathing out. There is a poem for you for when the bowl is empty. There is a poem for you to breathe in and out when you serve the food. And there is a poem for you to sit down beautifully. In Buddhist monastic life, poetry is everywhere. You use poetry as a means of practicing mindfulness.

When you put your bowl in front of you, you begin to practice like sitting meditation, enjoying the sitting, the breathing, while waiting for other brothers and sisters to come in. Don't lose any minute of your time waiting, just enjoy breathing in, breathing out, enjoying the fact that you are here in Plum Village practicing with the Sangha. There will be some chanting in the beginning. The monks and nuns will offer food to all the Buddhas in the cosmos and to all living beings in the cosmos. That's a way of linking to every living being. They will hold their bowls like this. They use their left hand and make this *mudra* and they will place the bowl on the two fingers and these two fingers will serve to make it stable. And they hold the bowl on the level of their eyes, like this. And with their right hand they make the *mudra* of peace, and they put it like this and they chant, "I offer this food to all Buddhas and *Mahasattvas* in the whole cosmos. I offer this food to the living beings in the realms of humans, animals, vegetables, etc. And you will notice that they have a spoon and the spoon is usually made of wood. Nowadays, they make it in plastic. To avoid the noise, you see. If you are using your fork or a spoon, please double your mindfulness. Because in monastic sitting, the meal is very quiet, very soft.

So every movement should be followed by mindfulness and it must be beautiful. It must be mindful, and we chew our food 30 times at least and we know what we are chewing. When you chew, don't chew your projects, your sorrow, your fear. You only chew what is inside your mouth, namely carrots, tofu, rice and bread and be aware that this is an ambassador coming from the cosmos to you, helping to nourish you. Just put your attention on your food and from time to time stop and look at the Sangha and realize that you are protected by the Sangha. You are among brothers and sisters who practice the same and you get the energy you need. Eat every morsel of food like you eat the piece of bread in the Eucharistic celebration. In each piece of bread there is the sunshine, there is

the cloud, there is the earth, there is everything. And if you chew like that that is meditation, very deep. And you should radiate happiness and joy and all of us will profit from your presence. The spoon, before the offering, will be facing outward. Suppose this is the spoon and the monk will place it in the bowl facing outward. And after the offering, he will take it and place it inward. Now the food is for him, but before, it is for an offering. And then there will be a novice bringing a container of water and a few grains of food to the window and recite a gata to offer that food to living beings who are hungry. This is a symbol that when you eat, you have to think of the people, the animals who are starving.

In the time of the Buddha, one day a small snake came to take refuge close to the Buddha because there was a big bird trying to eat her. And the Buddha said to the bird, “ Go away,” but the bird did not accept this. So the Buddha said, “I will share with you some of my food, but leave that snake alive.” And then the bird accepted. So, this story is known. The Buddha said before you eat, you put aside a little bit for the animals. It has become a tradition that in formal meals we always offer some food to the ants, the birds and so on. So the novice will be going to a window and chanting a gata in four lines and you will see it. And then the Five Contemplations. We have reduced the ritual to a minimum because you are not used to it, and I hope that you enjoy the formal meal. We organize a one here every week during the summer retreat. So everyone is invited for the walking meditation and the formal meal, all around. This is the only day of the retreat that all the hamlets are here together.

[Bell]

Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the inter-being nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.

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**Dharma Talk**  
given by  
Thich Nhat Hanh



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## Returning to Our True Home

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 16, 1996 in Plum Village, France.

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Good morning dear friends.

Welcome to the summer opening of Plum Village. Today we are on the 16th of July, 1996, and we are in the Upper Hamlet.

This is the Dharma talk for the very young people. We want to talk to you about pebble meditation. You know what a pebble is: a small piece of rock. This morning each young person should go and look for five pebbles. It may be a little bit difficult but you have to go around the campus in the Upper Hamlet or in the Lower Hamlet or in the New Hamlet and you look for five beautiful pebbles because we are going to practice pebble meditation in the next seven days. Those of you who feel young you can do that also.

After having found the five most beautiful pebbles, you have to go and wash them very carefully, with soap, and dry them, and you do that with love and care because the pebbles are going to help you to be more peaceful, more happy. If your mommy is there, or your big sister is there, have her make you a little bag in order to carry the five pebbles. A little bag like this. And every time you practice sitting meditation you have to bring the five pebbles along. Don't forget it. If you forget the pebbles, it is like a musician forgetting his or her guitar.

When you come to the meditation hall, you practice walking slowly in to the place where you will sit down. The moment when you enter the door of the meditation hall, you know that this is the meditation hall, a quiet place. A place of peace, a place of strength. And therefore you respect the silence. Very important. If you respect the silence of the meditation hall, then everyone will profit from the meditation hall. If you make a lot of noise in the meditation hall, that will not be kind to other people who do need the meditation for their practice.

When you enter the door of the meditation hall, bow to the Buddha. The Buddha may not be there on the altar, but he is somewhere in the garden. Even if you don't see a Buddha, bow to a flower because, believe it or not, the flower is a Buddha. Sometimes I bow to the moon, and I call the moon a Buddha. Moon-Buddha, flower-Buddha. Sometimes I bow to a tree-Buddha. And sometimes I bow to a child. I bow to a child with my respect, because I know that the child is also a Buddha. If the child practices to become very calm, very gentle, she is very close to being a Buddha. So, every time I bow to a child, I don't do it just for the sake of being polite. I do it as a practice, because I know that if a child is calm, and peaceful, and happy, he or she is very close to being a Buddha. And if she keeps practicing, she will become a fully enlightened Buddha. I do have great respect for all children. I do have great respect for adults too, because all adults have been children in the past.

After you bow to the Buddha, in the direction of the Buddha garden, you practice walking slowly, mindfully, to the cushion where you will sit. You make several steps. Breathe in, one step. Breathe out, one step. You walk like a Buddha. The Buddha walks very mindfully, very beautifully, and if you think that you are a student of the Buddha, you have to practice, you have to walk deeply. And when you arrive at your cushion, bow to the cushion, because the cushion is going to help you to sit peacefully. The cushion is a friend. You bow to the cushion, say "Thank you, cushion," and sit down. Remember: one step, one breath. Breathing in, I make one step, breathing out, I make one step, and I say, "In, out. In, out" until I arrive and I sit down.

And when I have sat down, I want to check whether my sitting position is correct or not because a correct sitting meditation is something like this. You are straight, you sit upright. Try to do it now: sit upright, in an upright position like this. But not stiff. Not like a piece of wood, no. The Buddha is not that stiff. The Buddha is very relaxed. Upright position. You may like to sit in the lotus position. The lotus position is one foot over the other. There. That is lotus position. Beautiful. Many of you can do it. Learn how to do it. Later on I would like you to draw a picture of yourself, sitting in the lotus position, smiling.

After you are sure that you are sitting in the most beautiful position, then you take out your little bag of the five pebbles. It is very important to do it slowly, mindfully. You take each pebble one by one, and you put it on your lap, just in front of your left knee. One, two, three, four, five. And you put the little empty bag next to them. After everybody has put his or her five pebbles out, you will hear the sound of the bell. The sound of the bell is the voice of the Buddha calling you, supporting you. The Buddha says something like, “Dear one, I am there for you. I am there with you. I am there to support you.” So you have to listen to the bell like that.

Every time during the day when you hear the bell, always practice like that. Listen to the bell like you listen to the most beloved person, the Buddha, because the Buddha is love, the Buddha is care, the Buddha is in your mother, is in your father, is in yourself. The Buddha is always calling you to go back to yourself, to be more gentle, to be more peaceful, to be more happy. So when you listen to the bell, the Buddha of the bell, the sound of the bell, never talk. Never think. Never do anything, because you are listening to the voice of a person you respect and you love a lot. Just stand there quietly and listen with all your heart. If there are three sounds, then you listen for the whole period of three sounds, and during that time you listen and you breathe deeply. But I would recommend that you don't do it automatically. You breathe in and you feel fine, you breathe out and you feel happy, that is very important. What is the use of breathing, of practicing, if you don't feel fine, if you don't feel happy?

After you hear the sound of the bell, you begin to practice pebble meditation. Here is the practice for the children, but I guess the adults can imitate. It's very beautiful practice. I love this practice. I breathe in, and I call the name of the person I love the most. If your mother is the person you love the most, when you breathe in, you breathe deeply and call “Mommy!” Call her name in such a way that she becomes totally present, even if she is not there with you, even if she is in the kitchen, or in another city, or another town, or even if she is no longer there alive. She is with you in that moment. Call her name, deeply, with all your heart, and breathe in, and she is there with you, right away, very real, very deep. And when you breathe out, you say, “Here I am.”

So during that practice of breathing in and breathing out, you and your mother are fully present. This is a very deep practice. It is not only for children. I practice it every day. I enjoy it very much, and I have more than five people I love the most. I am free to choose -- this evening I will choose five people, and next morning I will choose another five people. That can bring you a lot of happiness. Suppose you hold the name of someone who is very real, very fresh, very loving, very kind, and if you call his name, or her name, deeply, that person will be with you right in the moment and you can see that your body and your mind are refreshed by the presence of that person. So before the sitting meditation, you have to jot down the name of five persons whose name you think you are going to call. The Buddha is calling.

[Bell]

I just practiced “Dear Buddha,” breathing in, “Here I am,” breathing out. Very wonderful.

So if your mother is one of the persons you love the most, then you might begin by calling her name “Mother!” And when you breathe out, you smile and you say, “Here I am.” It is a very deep practice. Because meditation is to be there, to be present, and this we learn always. No matter how long you have practiced Buddhist meditation, you have to learn it again and again. To meditate means to be there. To be there with one hundred percent of yourself. If you are there only eighty percent, that's good, but that's not perfect. I don't blame you for not being perfect. I just ask you to do better and better all the time. Maybe yesterday I was able to be there eighty percent, today I try to be eighty-one percent; because the more I am present, the happier I become, the more solid I become. This is only for my happiness, my stability; not for someone else's.

You call the name of your mother five times, breathing in, and you say five times, breathing out, “Here I am.” And after you finished five breathing in, breathing out, calling the name of your mother, and then you use your two fingers, you pick up one pebble, and you move it to your right. You understand? Not complicated. And then you sit upright again, and you begin to breathe in again, and call the name of the second person. Suppose you love David. David is very sweet to you. David is a person who tends to be wonderful, compassionate, helpful. So you breathe in and you call “David!” and you breathe out and you say, “Here I am.” Here is the length of my in-breath. I breathe like this: [Ten second pause]. And during that whole time, I just call his name, or her name. So you have enough time in order to make him or her fully present.

And when she is fully present, you just break out and smile, and you say, “Here I am.” It is very wonderful. I think even during the first hour of practice, the first time you practice, you find joy and happiness already. I believe it. So you call his name five times, and you say “Here I am.” five times, breathing in and out, and enjoy doing that. I prefer you not do it, rather than do it and not enjoy doing it and think that it is something you have to do like a mathematics exercise. No, I don't want you to do meditation like doing a mathematics exercise. This is much more pleasant. Very nourishing, very wonderful. And I want to do it right! Otherwise later on you say “Thây did not teach me right.” I want to give you the right teaching, the teaching that can help you to be happy and peaceful.

And after you finish “David” five times, you move the second pebble to your right, until you finish all five pebbles. And if you still have time, if the bell doesn't ring yet, and then you continue the practice and you move the pebble from the right back to the left. And during the time of doing so, if the bell sounds, and there are still two or three pebbles to be practiced, it's OK, because we practice all our life. For children I don't want the practice to take too long a time. Just right for the young people. If they sit too long, they will get tired easily. So I don't want them to sit too long. I don't want adults to sit too long, too, if they suffer during sitting. It is better not to sit than to suffer while sitting. Please.

And when you hear the bell, just practice breathing in and out again. “Breathing in, I calm myself. Breathing out, I smile.” You have succeeded in your pebble meditation today and you are going to put it down in your notebook, that today I have practiced pebble meditation well, I succeeded. I had some joy, some compassion, and some happiness during the practice of pebble meditation. And after three sounds of the bell, practicing breathing in and breathing out, you hear a very small sound of the bell. This sound:

[Bell]

That sound is for you to bow, and to undo your legs and to massage them with gentleness. You practice massage, you try to be nice, to be kind to your legs. You help the blood to

circulate well in your leg. You have the time to do so. If you are the leader of the pebble meditation, please remember allow enough time for the other children to massage their feet. That is the practice of compassion. Remember, because during pebble meditation I want the leader to be a young person. So you select, you elect your own leader every time, to lead the pebble meditation. And you know if you are a leader of pebble meditation, you got to have a watch. I don't have any watch today.

So you have enough time to massage your feet, and after you have massaged your feet, you still have time, to do what? To put the five pebbles back into the bag, the small bag, and put it into your pocket. Later on you may practice walking meditation, slow walking meditation, but walking meditation is the subject of another Dharma talk. Today is just pebble meditation. So, dear young people, you know what you have to do today. Go and look for five beautiful pebbles. Wash them carefully and try to make a little bag for it. If you don't have a bag today, you can wait for tomorrow, after tomorrow. You may put it in a small envelope, a paper envelope. But I want you to have a very beautiful little bag in order to contain your five pebbles. So have a very pleasant day, happy day. When you hear the small bell, you stand up and bow and then when you hear another bell you turn around and bow to the Sangha, and you practice going out slowly, mindfully, beautifully, in the style of walking meditation. Have a good day.

[Bell]

My dear friends: meditation is the act of stopping and looking. We have to learn the art of stopping and the art of looking. And the practice may be pleasant, must be pleasant. It is possible to make the practice pleasant, nourishing. It is not hard labor. People speak of meditation in terms of *samatha* and *vipassana*. *Samatha* means stopping and *vipassana* means looking, looking deeply. If you stop, you stop well. And if you look, you look well. Stopping is an art. Stopping in order to give your body and your mind a chance to heal. Because our mind has the capacity of healing itself. Our body also, if we allow it, will be able to heal itself. But because we don't know how to stop, how to give our body a chance, our body cannot heal itself. Our mind also is a kind of body, a spiritual body. Our mind does have the capacity of healing itself. But if it does not heal itself, if it has not healed itself because we have not given it a chance — that is why you have to learn the deep art of stopping, *samatha*. *Samatha* is stopping. To stop in order for calm, concentration, tranquility, to become possible.

Imagine a river reflecting the full moon. The river must be calm in order to reflect the full moon. If the river or the ocean is full of waves, if it is too turbulent, then it can never reflect the beautiful image of the moon. Our body, if it is not calm, if it is not restful, then it will not be able to restore itself, to heal itself. You know that when an animal gets wounded because of a hunter, or because of some other accident, that animal in the jungle will find a calm place to lie down. That is the practice of all animals in the forest. And the animal will lie down there very quietly, not eating anything, until the wound is healed; because the animal knows that if it continues to look for something to eat, then its body will have no chance to rest and restore itself. So looking at the animal, we see already the wisdom of stopping and resting and calming. The animals can do it, why can't we do it ourselves.

Do we need to eat all the time, every day? I just finished a fourteen days fast, and I look fine. I even look better. You may think that I am a little bit thin, but I feel fine. By fasting, by not doing anything, by abandoning all projects, all desires, you allow your body to stop, to rest, to renew itself. And that is why during the time you are with us in Plum Village, try your best to learn the art of stopping, of resting. Now a season of labor comes. People are very eager to go to the beach and to other holiday resorts, and they think that they are going to rest, but I am not sure that they are going to rest. They may get very tired after the period of so-called

resting. Here in Plum Village, you have a Sangha. You have a community of many hundred people, and all of them are trying to really rest, really stop, and you try to do like them. You allow yourself a chance. If you can allow your body to rest, then you can also allow your mind, your consciousness, to rest also. All of us need it.

The animal knows that there is a reserve in itself. It can survive many, many days without eating, and that is why the animal is not eager to go and look for something to eat. In fact, fasting is a very wonderful way of healing yourself. The most difficult disease you have may just be healed by fasting. You don't even need a doctor. You are the doctor. You know your needs. You know how to lie down. You know how to lie down? Are you sure? You know how to sit quietly? Are you sure? Do you have the opportunity to lie down and really rest? Do you have the opportunity to really sit down, properly? Because in you there is a tendency to struggle, to do this, to do that, because you have been taught since time immemorial that you have to struggle for your happiness. And during many generations you have been struggling, you have been running. You have never been able to stop. Our great-grandfather did like that, our grandfather did like that, our father did like that, and now we are doing exactly the same thing. Always running, because we believe that happiness is something in the future, and you have to go there in order to grasp it.

So it is not that easy to stop and to rest. You have to learn, and you have to get the support of brothers and sisters who are doing the same. They don't urge you to do. They help you by doing that by themselves. When everyone is practicing walking (walking means stopping, walking meditation), sitting, enjoying a silent meal, because all these practices are just for the sake of stopping. Are you able to enjoy a meal without running, running inside? During the time of a meal, you may run into ten directions. You are not really there for your meal, and for your Sangha. And that is why you have to receive instructions properly, and you have to do it properly in order for our rest, our stopping, to be possible. You know how important it is to rest, to stop. That the animal is healed is not a miracle, because the animal knows the way how to heal itself.

Just yesterday, someone asked Nelson Mandela, the President of South Africa, what he'd like the most, what he needs the most. He said, "What I need the most is to sit down. Since the time I got out of prison, I have never had the chance to sit down." Poor man. Do you want to be the president of the republic? He said that he has not had a chance to sit down for himself, and to sit down with his children. What kind of life is that? When I heard the report, I asked myself whether, if he were given time to sit down, would he be able to sit down? I don't know whether he has learned the art of sitting or not, but if you don't know how to sit, then even if you are offered the time to sit, to do nothing, you will not be able to do so. You will stand up right away, and you continue to run. You are more fortunate than Nelson Mandela. You can afford to come to a retreat just to sit down, just to lie down and do nothing. But again, you have a chance. That does not mean that you can do it. Therefore, we have to learn from each other, and the Buddha has offered us so many ways in order for us to heal our self, including stopping. Breathing is stopping. Walking is stopping. Sitting is stopping. Eating is stopping. Meditation is to stop.

We have to believe in our capacity of healing, the capacity of our body to heal itself. You know when you cut your finger, you don't worry, because you know that it will heal by itself, provided that you don't interfere too much. You just wash it and leave it like that. Maybe in a few hours or one night it will be able to do so. So your body has the power of healing itself. You know it. For the more serious illness, it can also heal itself, provided that you give it a chance, you allow it to do so. So learn the technique of total relaxation, learn the technique of lying down there not doing anything, especially in your head, because many of us, while laying down or sitting, still run in our heads, still run in our minds. Because that is a habit of

one thousand, three thousand years already. We have inherited it from our ancestors and the society urges us to continue and to double that kind of speed.

The Buddha said that what you are looking for may be already there, in the here and the now. But you are running, and if you are running, how can you recognize what you are looking for. It is right there in the here and the now. Peace is available in the here and the now, believe it or not. Calm is also available in the here and the now. The Buddha is not in India. The Buddha is there in the here and the now. You can touch him at any time you want. The kingdom of God is also there in the here and the now. The present moment is the only moment where you can touch these wonderful things that you are looking for. But you always run, you abandon the present moment because you believe that what you are looking for is somewhere there in the future. So stopping means trying to dwell in the present moment, trying to go back to the present moment, because the present moment contains everything you are looking for, including your immediate need, resting. How can you rest in the future? How can you rest in the past? The present moment is the only moment when you can rest. So make good use of it.

Now let us ask the question whether you can dwell peacefully and restfully in five minutes, because our body needs it badly, our soul needs it very badly, and you know it. So please learn. All of us have learned about deep relaxation. In the lying position, you allow your muscles to be relaxed. You practice love directed to your body. You think you love yourself, but that's not evident. To love oneself means also to take good care of your body. That is one of the basic things. But do you allow your body to rest? Are you always assigning it to do something, always? You have never allowed your body to really rest, even during the time of sleeping, your body is assigned to do something, consciously or unconsciously. And even during the time of sleep, your body does not rest. In the lying position, allow yourself to be in the here and the now. All your projects, all your worries, must be postponed. Why do you have to worry when your body needs a rest? If you continue to worry, how could your body rest? So you have to support your body by not worrying.

When you practice breathing in or breathing out, you have to put one hundred percent of your mind into the in-breath and out-breath, and if you can do so, you stop the worry. You stop your projects. You invest in the in-breath and out-breath. I breathe in, I just enjoy breathing in. Breathing in for this moment is the most important thing I want to do, and I enjoy breathing in. Breathing in, I feel wonderful; breathing out, I smile. One in-breath, one out-breath, can help you do that, and help your body to be off pressure, because your body has always been under pressure, not only from society, from what you call deadlines, but from your mind. You don't have a habit of granting your body a real rest because you are used to worrying too much, to making too many projects. You think that your happiness, your safety, depends on these projects; and if you don't worry, who will worry for you? But you have been worried for many thousand years. So enjoy breathing in, because breathing in is a wonderful thing to do.

The Buddha left behind a very wonderful text called the *Anapanasati Sutra*, the Sutra on Mindful Breathing, and he presented to us a number of exercises that help us to practice deep relaxing and deep looking. There is one exercise you might like to practice: "Breathing in, I calm my body." "I calm my body," that means I let my body have a chance to do nothing, to calm down. "Breathing out, I smile to my body." Have you been kind to your body? Have you smiled to your body?

That exercise, "Breathing in, I calm my body; breathing out, I smile to my body," might be practiced when you sit, or when you lie down. Invest one hundred percent of yourself into the practice, because if you do well, then all thinking, all projects, all worries will be stopped.

You are at one with your in-breath, your out-breath, and you allow your body to rest. So, in a sitting meditation, in a sitting position, you allow your body to rest. On your cushions, you don't fight, even for enlightenment. You don't fight to become a Buddha. If you allow yourself to be, that's already wonderful. If you can afford to have half an hour of sitting, you know that you are luckier than Nelson Mandela. So please use your half hour of sitting wisely. Make a plan: tonight I will have a chance to sit for half an hour, so I know what I will do during that time. I will ask a Dharma brother, a Dharma sister, or a Dharma teacher, how I can succeed during that half an hour of sitting meditation. I have to succeed. You know I very much wish that the children succeed in their pebble meditation. We also have to succeed in our sitting meditation. Please don't do it for the sake of the form. We don't have that kind of luxury. Our body needs us. Our mind needs us. Therefore we have to love them, to take care of them, to allow them a chance to rest, to restore themselves.

Maybe during the first or second exercise of breathing, you feel already wonderful, because just to sit there and to breathe is already wonderful. Many people cannot afford to do that. Even if they want to do that, nobody tells them how to do it. Now we are in a Sangha. Everyone in the Sangha is able to help us: how to breathe in and breathe out, and to be relaxed, to be calm. And we have to cherish the chance of practice. And during the breathing in and out, you might feel wonderful. You might feel rested. And then the Buddha will advise you to proceed to the next exercise: "Breathing in, I feel joyful. I feel wonderful. Breathing out, I smile to my joy." This is nourishing, very nourishing. Believe it or not, you are there, alive. That is a miracle. That is the greatest of all miracles, and you have to celebrate it.

We have destroyed so many moments of our lives. We have destroyed so many days, so many months, so many years of our lives. We spent them in suffering, in anguish, in anger, and that is a waste. We have to cherish all moments that are left for us to live. We have to live peacefully, happily, and that is our greatest gift for the world, for the next generation. Our children need our happiness. They don't need our money. They need our happiness, because if we know how to live happily with each other, the children will learn it from us, and that is the greatest heritage we can hand down to our children. Many young people have told me that the greatest gift that parents can give to their children is their own happiness. You have to listen to them. They need it badly.

So during the time you practice breathing in, breathing out, you invest one hundred percent of your energy, of yourself, into the in-breath and the out-breath. That is for your body. That is for your mind. In the sitting position or in the lying down position, when you feel a little bit of joy, of confidence in your practice, then you practice, "Breathing in, I feel joyful. Breathing out, I smile to my happiness, to my joy." Continue like that, on the cushion. Please do not say that this is something difficult to do. It's simple. You can do it. And you have Dharma brothers and sisters around you to support you. If you want to support your brother or your sister, practice well. Practice so that stability and peace become something real, in the present moment.

The Buddha said that life is available only in the present moment, and if you miss the present moment, you miss your appointment with life. And that is why: go back to the present moment where you can be alive, where you can live deeply each moment of your life, and where you can allow your body and your soul to live. You do it for yourself, but you do it for all of us. We need you to be peaceful. We need you to be stable. We need you to have joy. That is for the sake of the world. Your practice is not an individual matter. Your practice will benefit the whole world. When you are able to breathe in and breathe out with joy and peace, the whole world profits. Not only will the people who are close to you profit, the whole world will profit.



[Bell]

I enjoy so much breathing in and breathing out. It's so easy. It's so pleasant. And I wish all of you could do the same. The bell reminds us. Every time you hear the bell, please practice going back to the present moment, breathing in, breathing out. Take good care of yourself. Feel alive. Feel that life is a wonder. Don't waste your life. Don't ruin your life, because your life is our life, also. There is a very simple gatha, a simple verse for you to practice. You might like to learn it today. When you breathe in, you say, "I have arrived," and when you breathe out, you say, "I am home." According to this practice, your true home is in the here and the now, and our practice is the practice of arriving every second into our true home, which is the present moment, the only moment when life is available. We have been running all our lives to the past, to the future, to our projects. Now it is time to go home. And if you go home and look and touch deeply, you'll be surprised to see that what you are looking for is already there. Peace is available. Touch it, live it, enjoy. And when you do it, peace will reveal itself more and more clearly.

"I have arrived. I am home." It means that I don't have to run anymore. When you hear the bell, you say "Listen, listen. This wonderful sound brings me back to my true home." My true home is here and now. The here and the now is universal. "Here" is not Plum Village; "here" is everywhere you are, and "now" is something that goes along with the here, because the here and the now cannot be divided. They are just one thing, and that is your true home. If you think that the Kingdom of God is your true home, then the Kingdom of God is in the here and the now. You don't have to die in order to enter the Kingdom of God. In fact, you have to be very alive in order to do so. To be fully alive, to go back to the present moment, and to be there with one hundred percent of yourself, means to be alive. "I have arrived, I am home." On your cushion, practice arriving. You arrive in every second, every minute, to be there, alive.

During walking meditation, you also practice arriving. If you practice slow walking in the hall, you take one step, you take one in-breath and you say "I have arrived." How wonderful! It's easy, simple, it's very pleasant to practice. Your left foot touches the floor, the wooden floor. It's wonderful. Do you know that the wood is made of cloud and sunshine? The wood is made of cloud and sunshine and wind and earth, and for your feet to touch the wood, it's a very wonderful thing. If you are really there, you feel it, but if you are elsewhere, you don't feel it. Wood is nothing, your foot is nothing, you are nothing, because you are not there, in the here and the now. You breathe in and you say, "I have arrived." You cut through all thinking, all projects, all worries, you go back and establish yourself firmly in the present moment.

One step only, one breath only, and already you can realize a miracle, the miracle of being fully alive. Don't tell me that you cannot do that. You know that you can do that. Just breathe in, and make it one step, and become fully alive by bringing yourself entirely back to the present moment. And when you breathe out, you are already a wonder, because to be alive and to be walking on the earth is a miracle. Remember, you have seen a dead body. You cannot make that dead body rise and practice walking meditation anymore. But you are not a dead body. You are alive, and your feet are strong enough to enjoy walking meditation.

Plum Village is made for you to practice walking. Many thousand people have been walking around here, mindfully, and enjoying every second. The site has become a holy site, because mindfulness has been printed again and again on this soil. This soil during World War II was a place where tragedy took place, but because of our practice, we have transformed the atmosphere, we have transformed the land's soil. It is now a very peaceful, very holy place. Thanks to you all who have come to Plum Village and practiced with us. You practice

walking meditation all year round, and we print our peace, our joy, on this soil, on this very soil. And when you practice walking around here you feel energy of practice.

When you say "I have arrived," breathing in, and when you say, "I am home," breathing out, you feel that you don't need to do anything else. Why do you have to pursue that project? Why do you think that if you don't realize the project, happiness is not possible? So you are able to realize stopping. Happiness is simple: I can have it right here and right now, and conditions for my happiness seem to be more than enough. I am still alive. My feet are still strong, my eyes are still in good condition, I can see the blue sky. I can see all kinds of forms and colors. My ears are also still in good condition. I can listen to all kinds of sounds, including the sounds of the birds. And my heart is functioning normally. You see, there are so many conditions for your happiness that are available, but because we are looking for another condition, that is why we deny all these conditions that are already existing. That is a loss. That is a pity.

Awakening -- Buddhism is the teaching of awakening. You have to wake up in order to realize that everything you are looking for is already there, may already be there. You have to recognize it. And walking meditation is also to stop. Even if you are still walking, you have already stopped. And if you make three hundred steps, make sure that each step brings you back peace, stability, and joy. Don't just walk like that, letting your mind wander around, going into the ten directions. Bring your mind back and tie it to your feet. Enjoy every step you make. Do it for all of us. If you can smile a smile of happiness, that will be very nourishing for your body, for your mind, for your Sangha, for the whole world. We need your smile badly.

"I have arrived, I am home." You practice like that for a few minutes. One breath, one step, in the meditation hall. And after some time you switch into the second exercise: "In the here and in the now," "In the here and in the now." It is exactly the same kind of practice. You have brought back yourself to the present moment. Maybe you have brought eighty percent of yourself back to the present moment. There is still twenty percent more to do. So when you say, "In the here and in the now," you may be able to be completely mindful and present. So each in-breath is to bring you back to the here; each out-breath is supposed to bring you back to the now, in the here and the now, because the here and the now is wonderful. Don't just say the word. It is silly just to say the word. The word is a means to help with your concentration, to show you what you are really doing, making peaceful, mindful, happy thoughts.

"I have arrived, I am home, in the here and in the now." And a few minutes of practice will bring you more stability and freedom. Freedom from what? This is not political freedom. Freedom from worries, freedom from suffering. You get it slowly, just by dwelling in the present moment, and touching the wonders of life. You will get rid of the kind of worries that are not essential at all, because peace and joy are possible. Why do you have to worry too much? "I am solid," because you have become solid. This is not autosuggestion, because after few minutes of practicing arriving in the here and the now, you feel that you are more solid, and you feel that you are more free. Free from what? Free from these worries, free from these anxieties, from these projects.

Please note that solidity and freedom are the two characteristics, the two basic characteristics, of *nirvana*. Nirvana is a state of being where solidity and freedom exist, and you can touch nirvana right in the first hour of practice. And if you continue the touching you'll be deeper and deeper all the time, until you can touch nirvana one hundred percent. The Buddha said that in the here and the now, you can touch nirvana with your own body. He did not say with your mind. Touching nirvana with your own body, that is the way the Buddha put it. It is possible. It is not an idea. It is not a notion. It is something you already can do. And happiness

will be something possible if stability and freedom are there. To practice means to cultivate solidity and freedom, which are essential to our well-being, essential to our happiness.

"I have arrived, I am home," and then, "In the here, in the now." Then, "I am solid, I am free." And finally, "In the ultimate I dwell." Or, if you want, "In the Buddha-land I dwell," or "In the Kingdom of God I dwell," because nirvana, the Buddha-land, the Kingdom of God, is available in the here and the now, and you have begun to touch it. The depth of your touching depends on your concentration, on your mindfulness, on your stability. André Gide said that God is available to you twenty-four hours a day. André Gide is a French author, and he's right. Nirvana also, the Buddha, the Buddha-land also, is available to you twenty-four hours a day if you care, if you really care. If you go back to the present moment and make yourself available, and then the other thing is also available. The other thing is the full moon, the cherry blossoms, the blue sky, the smile of your beloved one, life, nirvana.

Please don't be satisfied with words and notions. You have to get the real thing. The real thing is stability, solidity, and freedom. "I am solid, I am free. In the Buddha-land I dwell." And walking like that can make you very happy. You are there, but you are already in the real thing, in the ultimate. The ultimate means the world of no birth, no death. Nirvana is the world of no birth and no death. If you dwell in the present moment and if you practice looking deeply, one time, one day, you will touch very deeply the ground of your being, the ground of your being where birth and death vanish. It's like a wave. If the wave practices touching itself deeply, it will touch the water inside itself. A wave might be born or might be dying, but the water is not subjected to birth and death. Your true nature is the nature of no birth and no death, the nature of nirvana. So if you walk deeply, you begin to touch your own nature. That is why we say "In the ultimate I dwell." It's very deep.

And if you practice walking meditation outside, you can do it more quickly. Instead of one step, one breath, you make two steps, or even three steps, one breath. Instead of simply doing "I have arrived, I am home," you do like this: "I have arrived, arrived, I am home, home." So breathing in, I make two steps, two beautiful steps, and when I breathe out, I make two beautiful steps, and I enjoy it just the same. When you go back to your city and practice walking meditation in Central Park, you wouldn't like to go too slowly, like in the meditation hall. People will look at you and wonder what you are doing, you don't look very normal. You want to be normal, you want to be natural. So you can be very mindful, very concentrated, and yet you can look absolutely natural. You can make three steps while breathing in: "I have arrived, arrived, arrived." You don't have to close your eyes. In fact you have to open your eyes in order to enjoy the trees, the birds, the blue sky, and the people around you. And yet you are concentrated, because you are following your in-breath and out-breath.

"I have arrived, arrived, arrived. I am home, I am home, I am home." You'll be surprised to see that you have no desires left. That's wonderful. True happiness is only available if you have no desire. No desire is the object of my deepest desire. Why should I desire anything else? If I found it is wonderful in the here and the now and I have everything, why should I desire something else? Not a difficult thing. So, please practice and discover that the miracles, the jewels, the most precious things you are looking for are already available: the fact that you are alive, and many wonders of life within you and around you. So during the time you practice walking with the Sangha outside, you can make three steps or two steps, but I would advise you to use the same kind of speed that the Sangha is using, so that you become part of the harmony, of the symphony. And to walk like that is just to enjoy life. To be walking mindfully and enjoy every step you make is to celebrate life. You don't have an orchestra with you. You don't have drums or trumpets and other things in order to celebrate. You just touch the earth and walk with the other brothers and sisters, and you are celebrating the fact that you are alive, and you do it very deeply because you are dwelling in the here and the now. And

during the time of walking, your body rests. Your mind rests, also. Not only during the time of sitting or lying down.

About eating: eating is also resting. Eating is a very deep practice. You sit there with the community and you offer one hundred percent of yourself, not less. Don't sit somewhere else. Please sit with us one hundred percent. And you know in order to do that, in order to offer us your true presence, you have to practice mindful breathing. Mindful breathing will bring you back to the here and the now. We need you to be with us. And during the whole time of the meal, we touch only two things, our mind touches only two things: the food, which is the gift of the sky and the earth, and also the community of practice that is there. My mind does not think or embrace anything else, because to be alive, to be sitting there and enjoying a meal with brothers and sisters in the practice, is a wonderful thing.

This is something practiced by the Buddha and his monks and nuns during that time. It is called "one sitting lunch." You sit down very beautifully and you enjoy the meal until the end; meanwhile, you don't think. And you have to enjoy every moment of the meal. Sit upright, look at the food, smile to it. Each morsel of food is an ambassador from the cosmos. It contains sunshine, clouds, the sky, the earth, the farmer, everything. Each morsel of the food is a piece of bread offered to you by Jesus Christ during the Last Supper. You have to eat it mindfully, in mindfulness. Look into the piece of bread, look into the piece of carrot you are eating, one hundred percent of yourself, and touch that, deeply. When you pick up one piece of carrot, don't put it into your mouth yet. Look at it and smile to it. And if you are mindful, you will see deeply into the piece of carrot. Sunshine is inside. A cloud is inside. The great earth is inside. A lot of love, a lot of hard work is inside. And when you have seen clearly the real piece of carrot, you put it into your mouth, and you chew it mindfully. And please, be sure to chew only carrots, and not your projects, not your worries.

This is deep practice: enjoy chewing your carrot. It is wonderful. The piece of carrot is a miracle. You, also, are a miracle. And chew carefully. In Plum Village, we chew from thirty times to fifty times, because we love it. We don't have to do it, but because the time being together is wonderful. So you just spend time with your food, and every minute of your lunch should be happy. And from time to time, you would pause and look and smile at a sister or a brother in the Dharma. Not many people, including Nelson Mandela, have the time, have the chance, have the opportunity to sit down and enjoy a meal like that. We are very fortunate.

We are very glad that you have come and shared the summer opening with us. Today we have a formal meal, like in the tradition. It's a little bit longer than in other days, but we have to keep the tradition alive, so each week, we have just one formal meal, and during the time of the meal, we offer a little bit of food, symbolically, to living beings before we eat. Now it is time for walking meditation, to celebrate the fact that we are all still alive, then after that we will take a break before participating in the weekly formal meal.

Now you have learned how to walk. Please, from this time on, every time you need to walk, only use the style of walking meditation. We don't use any other kind of walking style here, just walking like you are, the happiest person ever.

## **Practices for the Twenty-first Century**

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on **July 21, 1996** in Plum Village, France.

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Good morning my dear friends.

Today is the twenty-first of July, 1996. We are in the Lower Hamlet. Today we speak English.

In my mind, the twenty-first century is like a hill, a beautiful hill with so many beautiful trees and paths and flowers and children. There will be only four more years before we start climbing the hill of the twenty-first century. You know a century is a period of one hundred years. I count on climbing it with you all. We should plan our climbing in such a way that joy, happiness is possible. We are now in the year 1996. If you have ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine and then two thousand, only four kilometers. And we only have four years left to prepare ourselves for the next century.

The twenty-first century is somehow like a beautiful garden. We expect to have flowers, fruit, beautiful trees, beautiful streams of rivers -- a beautiful garden where every living being has a chance to live, has a right to be. Not only the human person, but also the squirrel, also the snail, also the snake, will have their place in that garden of the twenty-first century. We shall have the coconut trees there, we shall have the kiwi tree, mango and so on. We will have all kind of animals. In order to have such a beautiful garden, a beautiful hill to climb and to be in, we have to prepare ourselves. If you don't feel ready yet, then you have to come together to discuss the strategy, how to begin the twenty-first century with confidence.

You know, the organic gardeners are very wise. They know to preserve the garbage, and they can transform the garbage back into compost. With that kind of compost, they can grow beautiful flowers, beautiful vegetables and trees. In the kitchen of the Buddha, we learn that the garbage may be useful. If you do not know how to take care of the garbage, then there will be a mess. You cannot live. But if you know how to take care of the garbage, then the garbage will become something very useful for us, to make our garden more beautiful, to make our hill more beautiful.

During the Twentieth century we have produced a lot of garbage, too much. The suffering of the war in Vietnam, is a lot of garbage. The garbage is still there, not only in Vietnam, but in America. The garbage produced by the Vietnam War is still delivered all over America as a nation. The suffering is still there, not only in the veterans, in their families, but in the deep consciousness of all Americans. And not only Vietnamese and Americans suffer because of that garbage produced by the Vietnam War, but all of us in Europe, in Australia, in Africa. All of us suffered because of the garbage produced during so many, many years.

We have produced a lot of garbage everywhere. In the former Yugoslavia the garbage is still intact. No one has taken care to transform the garbage. In the Middle East, the Gulf War also produced a lot of garbage. It produced a lot of garbage in the world and it also produced a lot of garbage in our heart, in our consciousness. To take good care of the garbage is to collect them and to put them together in a heap. Maybe you have to dig a hole, you dump the garbage in, you produce some heat, you water the garbage. The organic gardeners, especially, they know how to take care of the garbage and transform it into compost. So our suffering, the suffering we have caused, is all garbage. We should know how to good care of it order to transform them.

Who are the specialists? They are developed countries who are thinking of transporting garbage and dumping it on the Third World countries. That's not very responsible. We have only four years, before we start climbing the twenty-first century. We have to learn how to take care of our garbage now, so that at beginning of the new century we have enough compost to nourish our flower.

Today I want to talk to the children about the home they will live in in the twenty-first century. I have some vision about what we call the home of the twenty-first century. How can we organize our home in the twenty-first century so that we may live better? Architects have

been working on it a lot, the habitat of the twenty-first century. We want to bring our contribution. I think the home of the twenty-first century should have a room called the breathing room, a room where we can seek asylum from aggression, from noise, from rough speech, from anger, from afflictions. Every home has to be equipped with such a room. It is equivalent to our meditation hall here at Plum Village. It is a sacred place. It does not need to be big, but it should be a real place for peace. It may be three meters by three meters, or even smaller, but it should be a real place of peace.

Every time you want to enter this room you have to bow, because this is the territory of the Buddha, the territory of peace, of compassion. Facing peace and compassion we have to be very respectful. So before entering this room you should breathe in and out and you bow to the knob of the door, because the moment you touch the knob of the door you touch the Buddha, you touch God, you touch Jesus, you touch the kingdom of heaven. Our modern home should house the kingdom of heaven inside, should house the Pure Land inside. Please children, think, meditate on this and tell us your ideas, our home of the twenty-first century.

Every time mommy is angry, every time papa is shouting at mommy, at your brother or your sister, you feel hell in your house. You don't want to dwell in hell. You want to escape. Where can you go? The answer is the pure land, the kingdom of peace that is in your home. Go to that room, bow deeply to the door, breathe in and out, softly touch the knob of the door, turn it slowly, open it and step into it with mindfulness. There is only one way of stepping into the kingdom of peace and that is walking meditation, and you have learned that in Plum Village. Breathing in, I calm myself and I make a step, breathing out I smile and then I can step into the kingdom of peace. My daddy has no right to pursue me into that territory of peace and shout after me. Because once you are in that territory of peace, you have something like diplomatic immunity. No one can pursue you into the territory of the country of peace, of the Buddha.

I think the children will profit a lot from this room. How should we call this room? "Breathing room" is okay, but I guess that there are many much more beautiful names that you can use to name this room that is in our house. Every civilized family should have such a room, because in each house there are rooms for everything: a place for eating, a place for watching television, a place for guest, a place to do laundry. We have all kind of rooms, except the kind of room we need the most, a room where we can restore our peace, we can restore our dignity. A room where we can touch the Buddha, we can touch our ancestors, we can touch our peace and our happiness.

We should tell our architects, we should tell our artists, to design that room in such a way that when we enter into that room we feel peace at once. A little bit like every time we step into the meditation hall we feel something sacred. You are not supposed to talk loudly in the meditation hall, you are not suppose to run in the meditation hall, because this is a place where people can go back to themselves, and touch the depth of themselves. That is why I always ask the children after the Dharma talk to go out of the meditation hall in the style of walking meditation.

So we should house the kingdom of peace in our modern home. What about furniture in that room? You have to think about this and tell us. What do you think is needed? I think it would need a few cushions. I think it would need a little table, so that you can place on it a beautiful flower vase; because a flower or a beautiful branch can very much represent the beauty of the cosmos. You might like to spend one hour just to arrange a flower vase that has only one flower, a few leaves. During the time you arrange the flower vase, you practice peace, and you touch peace deeply within your self. So in this beautiful room you have a few cushions, you have a little table where you can put a beautiful flower. When you go in, you may bow to the flower. The flower is fresh, and you want to be fresh as the flower. "Breathing in I see myself as a flower, breathing out, I feel fresh." You know all of us were originally flowers. Look at the children. They look exactly like flowers, very fresh, very refreshing, and that is why I love to be surrounded by children. They make you feel young and fresh.

[Bell]

The children might be angry at times, the children might be jealous at times, but they can always return to being a flower very easily. That is a miracle. But we adults, it's not that easy. We cannot return, go back to our state of being fresh very quickly. All adults have been children. Our original happiness, not original sin, is being a child. But because we have not been able to take good care of our flower, our flower is not very fresh when we grow up. So to practice meditation is to protect our floweriness, not to let ourselves wither because of what is happening in our daily life. Look at the children, their eyes are really flowers, their mouths are flowers, their little hands are two beautiful flowers, their little teeth are flowers, very beautiful, very fresh. Every time you go into the meditation hall, you look at the flower, you bow to it, and you recover your floweriness. "Breathing in I see myself as a flower": that is not wishful thinking, because you were originally a flower. It is possible for you to return to the state of a flower.

Maybe because you have cried a lot, that is why your eyes are not as limpid and as fresh as the eyes of children. But if you practice for few months, touching the refreshing elements within you and around you, you will recover the floweriness of your eyes. When we look at you through your eyes, we can touch the floweriness in you. Your smile is also a flower. If you have lost your smile, don't be discouraged. The dandelion is still keeping it for you. If you know how to look at the dandelion and you breathe and you smile the flower will hand it back to you, your flower. It's not difficult. The full moon, the blue sky, everything in the cosmos is still keeping your smile for you. They are very kind. You need only to touch them and you ask for your smile back. We need you to smile.

What else do we need as furniture in the breathing room, meditation room? I think we need something to burn, incense. I prefer a very light kind of incense, not too strong. You don't have to burn a lot of incense. There are people who go to the temple and burn a whole bunch of incense, it can be very suffocating. Just one stick of incense, the kind of incense made of natural ingredients, sandalwood, something like that. We don't need anything else. Maybe we need a bell, even a mini bell. Every summer I used to teach the children how to invite the bell. I think each family should have a bell, even a small one. Everyone in the house should be able to practice inviting the bell to sound, because the bell is considered to be the voice of the Buddha calling us to our true home, to smile and to touch the peace and the floweriness in us. Please, all Dharma teachers and all the brothers and sisters, teach your children how to invite the bell.

You'll get much better just after breathing in and breathing out with the sound of the bell. When you invite the bell to sound you listen to it like you would listen to the person you love the most. And you practice breathing deeply, calming yourself and smiling. I'm certain that after three in-breaths and out-breaths like that you'll feel much better. Every time you get angry, you know, according to the practice you should not say anything. You should not do anything, everything you say, everything you do when you are angry may cause damage. The best way is to think of the room of peace and you start turning toward the direction of the room of peace and you practice walking meditation slowly to that room. Your mother looks at you and she knows what you are doing. You are practicing to take good care of your anger. She admires you for doing so. You are still young, but you know how to handle your anger.

In school they might teach you everything except how to take care of your anger. When you go to a retreat you have to learn these kinds of things. You make it into a habit every time you get angry, even with yourself. Then you have to turn to the direction of the peace room, the breathing room, and you go slowly in that direction in the style of walking meditation: "Breathing in I calm myself, breathing out I smile to myself." That is very kind of you to smile to yourself, because you are suffering. When you suffer you need love, and you are the one who can offer love to yourself first. Don't wait for another person. When you arrive at the door of the breathing room, you bow, because, that is the kingdom of peace. You go into your own heart. It is a room, but it is also a domain of your heart. Turn it slowly, open it, go into it with walking meditation. When you see your cushion, you bow to it and you sit down.

After you sit down, you may like to light a stick of incense, but if you are not in the mood to light incense, then you may bow to the little bell, pick up the little bell and hold it on your hand like this. You look at it. This is a baby Buddha, a baby Bodhisattva that could help me to go back to myself. And you breath in and out three times. If you remember the gatha, that's wonderful. But if you don't remember the gatha, it's okay with just breathing in and breathing out: "Body, speech and mind in perfect oneness, I send my heart along with the sound of this bell, may the hearers awaken from forgetfulness, and transcend the heart of anxiety and sorrow."

You have to practice in your own language. You've got to have an Italian translation if you are an Italian boy or girl. If you are Dutch, then you should have a gatha in Dutch. It's nice to practice. You can even put it into music. And you can meditate in music. Why not? In Vietnamese we chant it in music. When we finish chanting it, either in silence or with the words, we feel much better already.

Now we touch the bell with the inviter. We don't call it a stick. Bell inviter. We say "invite the bell to sound." We don't say "hit the bell." We want to be kind. This is the act of waking up the bell. You do not want to do violence to the bell. You announce to the bell that you are going to invite it strongly, so that everyone can hear--this is waking the bell up. The waking up sound is made by touching the bell inviter to the bell. But instead of removing it you just keep it there, so that the sound is only a half sound. Everyone in the community and everyone in the house knows that a really loud sound will be heard, so there is no surprise. Everyone has the chance to prepare himself or herself for the call of the Buddha. The Buddha is going to call you. So you already practice breathing in, while waiting for the real sound, and then the real sound comes.

[Bell]

That is the voice of the Buddha inside you calling you back to your true home, the home of peace, the home of tolerance, the home of love. When you hear the sound, you practice breathing in and out according to another gatha. Of course you know by heart: "Breathing in I calm myself, breathing out I smile." But the other gatha is "Listen, listen; this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home." You say "Listen, listen;" it means I listen, I listen, that's when you breathe in, and when you breathe out, you smile and you say "this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home." This is the voice of the Buddha inside. If you do that three times, you feel much better. Peace has become something real. You don't suffer like a few minutes before. And you know something? Your mommy hears it. She is not in the room but she hears it. She is very proud of her child who tries hard to take care of his or her anger. The next time when she gets angry, I'm sure that she will do like you. Instead of shouting, she will go to the breathing room, she will practice like you.

Only one person practices, but the practice benefit all the other people. Your daddy may be angry, but at the sound of the bell he may be released from his anger. All his children are practicing peace, practicing taking good care of their anger. So when the atmosphere of the family has become difficult for you to breathe, you should not stay there and bear. Because when mommy and daddy get angry with each other there is something like a storm hanging in the air and that is not healthy for the children, because the heavy atmosphere penetrates into the child. It's not healthy for the child and the child has no escape.

In the old times our home was surrounded by a big garden, and every time the child happened to be in an atmosphere of tension, he could always run out and play with the lake, the pond, the dragonfly, the butterfly, or he might go to an uncle, or an aunt, or a cousin. But now we live in a very small apartment house, no uncle, no aunt, no cousin, no lotus pond, no coconut tree, nothing, only cars below, a lot of noise, a lot of dust. The child has no escape. Sometimes the child takes refuge in the bathroom. She suffers so much, she locks the bathroom from inside and her parents do not know that their child suffers so terribly in the bathroom. But you are not safe, entirely safe, in the bathroom because the sound and the atmosphere of tension breaks through the door and comes in. It continues to afflict you. So it is very hard for children in our days. Therefore the breathing room, the room of peace, is a



solution for the twenty-first century. Please, you who are architects, who sit there, listen to us. Design us a home where we have a territory of peace, where we can have an island of peace in the midst of the ocean of turbulence. Design us the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, the Pure Land in our modern home, please. You who are artists, help us to decorate that room, to arrange that room so that we will have a chance, we will have an escape.

While you are practicing breathing, and touching peace, and restoring peace, your mother may be interested in doing the same. My child is practicing alone. I should go there and support him. Very kind of her. So instead of cutting carrots, she says, "Well, I can cut my carrot later on. I should join my child now." So she puts down the knife, she goes slowly in the direction of the peace room and she practices walking meditation, and suddenly you hear the sound of the door. You guess that your mommy is coming to join you. And you feel happy. It is very nice to be practicing with a Dharma sister who is your mother. Then you feel that she has come and she sits down just behind you and she practices breathing in and out. Now you feel supported. I think that this is one of the most beautiful things you can see in life, mother and son or daughter sitting quietly in the lotus position and practicing breathing in and out to restore peace. If you are a painter, please draw us that painting. If you are a musician, then write a piece of music on that.

And daddy, what is he thinking, sitting alone outside? I think his love for you and for your mommy is always there. Sometimes it is covered up by some irritation, but the love is still there intact. Your practice of breathing and taking good care of your irritation, anger, will move him. It would be no surprise if he will join you later on. Happiness is something possible. You don't have to go to the supermarket and buy anything at all. Suddenly happiness comes down to your family. That is one idea concerning our home for the twenty-first century. And the children please have a Dharma discussion today. Find out what you like about the breathing room, the peace room in the house -- the embassy of the Buddha in your own home.

Another idea concerning the home of the twenty-first century is a garden where there is a path for walking meditation. Because walking meditation can release a lot of tension, can help you to touch the beauty of life, of nature. That garden may be a collective garden of a group of houses. That garden should be designed in such a way that it expresses love and compassion and harmony. The garden should present nature, real nature, not artificial. No chemicals, no insecticides, should be used in that garden. You should not use the kind of weed killer that destroy the soil. You should use only organic means to build up that beautiful garden. You must respect the right of living beings to cohabit with us in the garden. We should be able to meet the snail in the garden.

If the lotus flower in the garden is covered by many small living beings and cannot flower, then you should not use violent insecticides. Maybe you should try garlic or onion. You crush pieces of garlic and onion and you mix up with some water and you spray. And these small living beings will go to another place to be and leave your lotus flower to bloom. How do you do it in the Upper Hamlet? I have seen two tiny flowers, lotus flowers covered with so many tiny living beings. I know that you don't have the idea of killing them, but we should try means like that. I learned that if you cultivate vegetables together with garlic or onion then you can keep these insects away. There are many nonviolent ways of growing a garden. You who are experts on organic gardening, you have to tell us how to build up such a garden. Such a garden is the garden of Eden. It is a real place for children and adults at the same time. If you cannot afford to have a private garden at home then you should arrange it so that a complex of houses enjoys a collective garden, where people collectively take good care of the garden and practice love and kindness, harmony and cohabitation with other living beings.

[Bell]

Young people, as soon as you have built your home in the twenty-first century please don't forget to invite me. I will be very glad to come to be in your garden, and to sit in your peace room, and breathe in and out with you, and I promise that I will bring along my teapot and prepare tea for you. When you hear the little bell, stand up and bow to the Sangha.

[Bell]

Yesterday during the question and answer time I was able to talk to you about how to take care of our sorrow, our sickness. You need to organize Dharma discussions in small groups to deepen our understanding of how to practice it. Instead of fighting our pain, our anger, our depression, we try to take good care of it — the way a mother would take care of her child.

Today, I would like to offer you another way of taking care of your pain. How to bear your pain easily. How to live with your pain. How to accept it with suffering so much. It's fine if you can transform it, but while it is still there, there are ways that you can live in peace with it. The Buddhist teaching on this is very clear, very concrete. It has to do with the teaching of love. We have to practice love directed to our own self, body and mind. We should learn how to love, and first to love our self. Love is not just the will to love. Love is the capacity of reducing the pain and offering the peace and the happiness. All these are practice. And you can practice.

In the teaching of the Buddha we speak of getting to the other shore, *paramita*. *Paramita* means from this shore you go to the other shore. From the shore of suffering you cross the river to go to the shore of emancipation, of non-suffering. How long does it take for you to come from this shore to the other shore? Sometimes you can do it very quickly. If you have an irritation, you are on this shore. If you know how to take good care of your irritation it will be transformed in just a few minutes, and suddenly you are on the other shore. Please do not think that Bodhisattvas or Buddhas alone can go to the other shore. You, you can do that, too. Several times a day. Every time you are subject, you are the victim of an affliction, like anger, hatred, fear, irritation, you can always practice crossing the river to go to the other shore. The Buddha said if you want to go to the other shore, don't just stay here and pray. "Please, the other shore come here so that I can step on you." The Buddha said you should not do like that. You can go to the other shore only by crossing, either you use a ferry boat or you swim. You cannot pray for the other shore to come. And the ferry boat is the Dharma. The Buddha always said "My teaching is a raft for you to cross the river of suffering. Use it as a raft and not as something you carry on your head." So as a good practitioner you should get the raft, the ferry boat, in order to be able to cross the river of suffering by ourselves. We should learn the way, the Dharma.

The method I'm going to present to you is called the practice of the immeasurable mind. A mind that can be measured is not a very big mind. A heart that can be measured is not a large heart. That is why you have to practice the unmeasurable heart, which is a very important teaching of the Buddha. There are four elements that make up true love. It is *maitri*, translated as loving kindness, *karuna*, translated as compassion, *mudita*, translated as joy, and *upeksha*, translated as equanimity, nondiscrimination. We practice so that these element of true love will make our heart into something unmeasurable. This is something we practice in our daily life. As our heart begins to expand, to grow large, we are able to contain, to bear, any kind of suffering. It may be that we don't suffer at all, even if we embrace the suffering within us.

In the six *paramitas*, the six boats crossing the ocean of suffering, we have the boat of charity, meaning forbearance. Forbearance is the capacity to embrace difficulties, to embrace the pain, and not suffer. If your heart is large, you can embrace any amount of pain and yet you don't suffer. That is one of six boats carrying us to the other shore.

Forbearance does not mean that you try to suppress the pain. The Chinese way of writing is this: this is the heart and this is a kind of sharp knife that can cause the pain. The heart is so big that even if the knife is there it does not affect it, and finally the knife is transformed into a non-knife element. The Buddha used a very wonderful image, and he used it several times in his lifetime of teaching. He said suppose you have something dirty, if you pour it into your water container then that water you cannot drink. No one can drink such water. If you pour urine, some excrement, or something you spit out from your stomach, then you can't use the whole container of water, you have to throw it away. Even a tiny bit of dirt falling into your glass, you cannot drink it. But if you throw that container of dirt into a large river. If you throw the dirt, maybe one kilo, or ten kilos, into an immense river, people in the whole area

can still drink water from the river. That's because the river is big, and it takes no time at all for the river to transform the dirt. Overnight the dirt will not be there, because a huge amount of water is circulating. The whole amount of mud underneath will be able to transform the dirt you threw yesterday and the river becomes limpid, entirely ready for you to drink.

The difference is not whether or not you throw the dirt in. You throw the dirt, the dirt is real, existent. But if your container is small, then the whole thing has to be thrown away. But if it is a big container, it is a big river, then it can embrace the dirt very easily and it will transform the dirt very quickly, just overnight. Your heart, also, if your heart is small, then you cannot bear the amount of pain and suffering inflicted on you by society, by another person. But if your heart is large, you can very well live with it. You can embrace it, and you don't have to suffer. So the practice of the four immeasurable minds is to blow up your heart until it becomes a big river. And the way of making your heart big is to use the instruments of *maitri*, *karuna*, *mudita*, and *upeksha*. The essence of it is the practice of meditation, of looking deeply.

Yesterday we spoke about salvation by insight. You can only be saved, you can only be liberated by your insight. And how could insight come? You have to practice concentration. You have to practice looking deeply, and as you continue to practice looking deeply, the insight will come and liberate you from your suffering.

Mencius was a Chinese philosopher, very well known. He lost his father when he was very young, and his mother had to move into a poor quarter of the city to make a living. She stayed up very late in the night to do the work of weaving. One day the little boy came home very dirty, with his clothes all torn. He just had a fight with the children in the neighborhood. He became something like a delinquent child. She got angry, because she had great expectations of her little boy. She was doing the work of weaving. She stopped and she was about to punish him, to shout at him. Suddenly she stopped, because insight came to her. She was able to see that in the neighborhood there was no school. There was only a slaughter house. The children didn't go to school. They spent time playing on the road and playing games like slaughtering a pig or a calf. If the adults do things, then the children imitate. They would use a raw sweet potato to represent a cow, they used four incense sticks for legs of the cow, and they gathered and performed the killing. They imitated adults. And of course they would fight each other and say rough words to each other. That is the environment in which the mother of the boy had put him. On the verge of shouting at him, the mother realized that it's her fault. Any child put into that environment will become the same. So she did not do anything and she was not angry anymore. That is salvation by insight.

Instead she stayed up later into the night, worked harder and saved money. She had an intention to move to another quarter of the city. Three months later she was able to move to a better neighborhood, where there was a school, where the children were clean and polite. She did not have to punish the child, to shout at him, to suffer. The boy after that became a very intelligent, hard-working student, and finally became a very famous philosopher.

You don't have to suffer if you have insight -- if you understand and that understanding is the fruit of deep looking. If we suffer so much, it is because we are ignorant. If we get angry at our father, at our mother, our son, our daughter, or our partner, it is because we are still ignorant. Practice in looking deeply will allow you to see how the other person has become like that. He was not like that when you married him, but now he is like this, like this, very hard to be with. And who is responsible? Put the questions in front of you and meditate. When I first married him, he was not like that. When I first married her, she was not like that. Why has she become so unbearable today? Who is responsible? Should I blame her, or should I blame myself, or should I blame society? All these questions help with our meditation. To meditate means to confront reality and not to escape. If you are running away from your real problems, you are not meditating correctly. You need to sit in a mound of calm, of concentration. You need to sit in a mound of mindfulness in order to confront these hardships and to look into the nature of this suffering.

[Bell]

If your father considers you to be his property, like a house or a sum of money or a car; if he considers you something like one of his belongings, he thinks he can do anything with you because you are his child, his son or his daughter. He does not know that you are a person, a human being, with the right to think and to act and to follow what you believe to be beautiful, good, and true. He only wants you to follow the path he has traced for you. You have to ask why? Why is your father like that, because around us there are fathers who are different? There are fathers who are capable of treating their sons and their daughters as free living beings with a lot of respect. I have a practice and I treat my students with respect, even if they are very small, because I have the insight that only by treating them like that could the best thing in them come out. And that's not only for their sake, but my sake, and the sake of many people, many living beings. Because I know how to treat my students like that I have been able to bring out so many talents that are buried in each of them. If you ask why I can do like that, it's because I have been lucky. I have had the teacher. I have had Dharma brothers, and sisters. I have learned the Dharma, so the Buddha has opened my eyes. I'm liberated from my narrowness, my prejudices.

If your father has not been able to be like that because he was just unlucky, if you blame him, if you want to punish him, he will suffer more, that's all. You cannot help him. Only when you say "Daddy, I understand you, why you are like that. I would prefer that you are not like that, but what can I do? Your education was like that. Your environment was like that. You were not in touch with the kind of teaching or insight that has a liberating nature." You don't say it, but you tell yourself about it. Suddenly, your hatred, your anger toward your father just vanishes. Your father becomes someone who needs your help, your love, rather than your punishment. Running away from your father is a way to punish him. You want him to suffer. That is why you run away from him. Even if you kill yourself, it is with the intention to make him suffer. You say, "You see, I killed myself because of you. I want you to suffer because you have treated me like an animal, like a possession of yours." So even if you kill yourself, if you run away from home, that is not inflicting the suffering on yourself, but the will to harm, the will to make suffer the person you think to be the cause of your suffering.

Between parents and children there is a fight. If you don't practice, if you are not wise, if the elements of *maitri*, *karuna*, *mudita*, and *upeksha* are not there in our love, then we create hell for each other. Always in the fight between parents and children, it is the children who are the losers, because children are not supposed to speak back with the terms used by parents. The parents may beat their children, but the children cannot beat their parents. The parents can abuse their children with words, but children cannot do that. Because they cannot express the violence they have received, that is why they get sick. The violence they receive stays within them and seeks the way to go out, to get expressed. If the young person hangs himself, or shoots himself, that is, he wants to express his anger, his frustration, his violence, there is no other way out. So if you inflict something on yourself, it is because you have no other ways of expressing the violence in you, the hatred, and the anger in you. You are the victim of the violence you have received from your parents and from society.

Poor young child. She did not have any means to protect herself, to protect himself. The parents are not wise enough not to pour their violence on the children, even if they intend to love them and make them happy. I know of a young man, who reacted to his father, who is a medical doctor. The medical doctor had been my student when he was studying medicine. He sounds like a young man of the new generation. He promised to himself that he would be the kind of father who would be different from his father. But when he became a father, he did exactly the same thing as the father had done to him. You hate your father. You promised that when you grow up you will not be like your father. You will do the opposite of your father. Yet, when you grow up you get married, you have children, you do exactly like him. That is the wheel of *samsara*. To practice is to cut through the wheel of *samsara*. You don't allow it to continue, with you and with your children.

So, in the light of this practice, both generations must make an effort. We should recognize the violence in us. The kind of violence that is destroying us, and destroying the person we

love. All intentions, even all intentions to love and to make that person happy, make him, make her, suffer.

So how to help the parents handle the violence, their suffering, so that they will not pour it on their children? How to help the children, how to take care of their violence, how to transform it, not to hate their parents? Both parties have to seek the path of deep looking because both generations are just victims. The children think they are victims of their parents, and the parents think they are victims of the children. Children of other families find out they are not like my children, so we continue to blame each other. We don't accept the fact that violence is inside of both of us. Instead of fighting each other, we should come together and find a way out, between parents and children, between partner and partner. It is not because we have suffered that we have to make each other continue to suffer. We suffer very much because of the same reason. Therefore we should be allies for each other rather than enemies. The amount of suffering in us is enough to instruct us how to not make the same mistake. The Buddha said "What has come to be, you should practice looking deeply into its nature." Once you begin to understand its nature, how it has come to be, then you are already on a path of liberation.

So partner has to come to partner and agreed on the fact that both of us have suffered. Both of us have violence, hatred, afflictions in us. Instead of opposing each other, blaming each other, we should help each other, practicing together, and you do that in the context of a Sangha, with the help of a teacher, or many teachers, many brothers, sisters in the Dharma. Because everyone has practice, everyone can try and help bring light into your suffering and help you to practice. In the beginning, walking is difficult, but walking with a few friends in the Dharma, make it easier. In the beginning breathing is not natural, it is something like forcing you to do things that are not natural. But finally with the support of brothers and sisters in the Dharma, you find breathing is wonderful, natural, calming, refreshing, transforming.

We feel that we are victim of injustice. Most of us, not to say all of us, feel somehow we are the victims of many forms of injustice, coming from parents, from ancestors, from nature, from society. We feel that no one understands us. It's very hard for us to accept what has come to us. Suffering is there, real. The Buddha said the first truth, the first of the four noble truths, is the presence of suffering, the existence of suffering, *dukkha*.

A two year old child, struck with hate, a child born crippled, you cannot bear it, you blame God. If God exists, how could God allow such a thing to happen? You are very young, suddenly you have cancer. You cannot believe it. Have you done anything to deserve that? If you cannot blame your parents, then you blame society, and if you don't find someone to blame, you look up and you blame God. The feeling of being a victim of injustice is always there in every one of us. We are mistreated, and the more we feel that injustice in us, the more we suffer. The only way is to meditate, to understand.

Yesterday, I talked about the young person who is so angry with his father and who made that declaration. The young man said "I don't want to have anything to do with my father." We understand. The young man was so angry. He felt that all his suffering has come from his father. He wants to be entirely other than his father. He doesn't want to hear anything about his father, to see anything about his father. He wants to be completely cut off from that part of existence. But if he practices looking deeply, he will see that he is only his father. He is only the continuation of his father, even if he hates his father with his whole being. Hating his father is hating himself. That is something we get when we practice looking deeply. There is no alternative, except accepting your father, embrace your father. If your heart is small, you cannot embrace him, you've got to have a big heart. How to make your heart big, so that there is enough room to embrace your father?

The practice of looking deeply is the only practice that helps your heart to expand, the unmeasurable mind, the unmeasurable heart. When you look deeply, you begin to understand why your father is like that, why you are like that. You see that both you and your father are victims. If you put yourself into the situation of your father, you would do exactly the same thing as he has done. Just looking around you see that. Many young men hate their fathers,

promise that they will do exactly the opposite, but they have done exactly the things that their fathers have done: samsara. So with that kind of insight you can no longer be angry. Insight helps your heart to expand, and suddenly you have plenty of place and your father can be embraced in yourself. Love become possible -- hatred, anger, just transforms into love. What a miracle. It is *vipassana*, the practice of looking deeply, that can perform that miracle. Salvation by insight, by understanding.

You blame your sickness, you complain that you are sick, you are ill. You think that it is very difficult to bear your illness. It makes you suffer so much. Even if it is physical pain, if you know how to practice making your heart grow big, then you have the capacity of accepting the physical pain very easily. You fancy that if you pray to God, if you pray to Avalokiteshvara, if you've got a talented doctor, then you will have perfect health. And usually we enjoy perfect health. But the idea of perfect health is just the outcome of ignorance. There is no such a thing as perfect health. If you are still alive, that is because during your childhood you were ill a lot, got sick a lot, and by getting sick like that you developed the immune system, because the fungi, bacteria, the viruses are always there, ready to attack. You can die very easily because of them. You have survived, because during your childhood you were very often sick, and during the time of sickness you had an opportunity to learn how to release the antibodies in you that were developed. So thanks to that time of illness, that happened during your childhood, you are still alive today. So if you have some kind of illness today, you have to practice looking deeply in order to accept it and live in peace with it.

There are four basic diseases with which all of us are struck, whether we want them or not. The first disease is death. I carry that disease in me, you also, death, you have to die someday. The Buddha reminds us to practice the five awarenesses. I am of the nature to die. I cannot escape dying. Death is a disease that strikes everyone and you carry it with you. You may say "I have cancer. I will die in three months. You don't have cancer. You don't have to die." That's not correct. We may die a little bit after you, but we will have to die. And it is not sure that we will die after you. You have cancer, but maybe you live longer. Impermanence, who knows. So every one of us is struck by that basic disease, death.

The second disease is old age. All of us bear the disease, carry the disease inside. The Buddha said "I am the nature to grow old, I cannot escape old age." The third disease is sickness. I am of the nature to get sick, I cannot be free from sickness. So it is better to learn to accept sickness than to fight. The more you fight, the more you suffer.

Then, I am of the nature to be born again. It is a horrible thing to be born again to many people, because throughout their life they have suffered so much that they wish they will never be reborn. Sometimes we celebrate our birthday, but there are those that are very afraid of being born again. Do you want to live forever? Can you bear the thought that you have to live forever? It's very frightening if you are not allowed to die. Sometimes we are so tired, sometimes we suffer so much, that we think that to die is the only way to liberate us. Sometimes we suffer because of illness. We cannot eat by ourselves, we cannot walk and many people have to attend to us. We are completely useless in this life and yet we are condemned to live forever. If someone comes and says "If you want to live, to live forever, you will get it, sign here." I think you will be frightened. That is a kind of sentence, most frightening. You are struck by the disease of being born. Because being born means you have to go through again. You will have to go through again what you have been through. After you die, you will be reborn in order to do the same. Very frightening.

But these four diseases, birth, old age, sickness, and death can be overcome, just by the practice of looking deeply. The scripture called the Heart Sutra is an instrument for you to practice. If you practice, if you have the luxury of practicing the Heart Sutra, then one day you will be able to touch the world of no birth and no death. "Listen Shariputra, things are in themselves empty, nothing is created, nothing dies. There is no coming, no going, no being, no non-being." That is the finger pointing to the world, to the world of no birth and no death. If you know how to practice touching the world of no birth, no death, then you overcome the

fear of these four diseases, birth, sickness, old age, death. Your heart, your understanding, becomes so immense, that looking at the so-called birth, death, disease, old age, you just smile. You are not afraid at all.

Suppose there is a wave, a wave that is living its life as a wave. There is one moment when the wave is born, there is one moment when the wave reaches its highest peak, there is one moment when the wave begins to go down, and there is one moment when the wave disappears on the surface of the ocean. The wave is so busy, paying attention to outer appearances, the wave has never been able to touch its true essence that is water. Yes, concerning a wave there is birth, death, high, low, more beautiful, less beautiful. But concerning water, there is no birth, no death, no high, no low, no being, no non-being. If the wave is able to touch its nature as water, it will overcome all fear, all suffering, caused by the idea of birth, death, high, low, ugly, beautiful.

The only way is to practice looking deeply, to have insight. Therefore the suffering, even if it is there, whether coming from society, coming from parents, coming from children, coming from friends, coming from war, from sickness, if you get the knowledge, if you get the insight, if your heart becomes immeasurable, if you can touch the true nature of no birth and no death, you can very easily embrace all these kinds of suffering. And you don't have to suffer. That is the teaching of *shanti paramita*.

#### New Century Message from Thich Nhat Hanh

Tu Hieu Temple and Plum Village, December 7, 1999

*To All Venerable Monks, Nuns, Lay Men And Lay Women Of The Sangha In The Tu Hieu Lineage, Inside And Outside Of Vietnam*

Dear Friends,

The Twentieth Century has been marred by mass violence and enormous bloodshed. With the development of technology, humanity now has the power to "conquer" Nature. We have even begun to intervene in the chemistry of life, adapting it to our own ends. At the same time, despite new and faster ways to communicate, we have become very lonely. Many have no spiritual beliefs. With no spiritual ground, we live only with the desire to satisfy our private pleasures.

We no longer believe in any ideology or faith, and many proclaim that God is dead. Without an ideal and a direction for our lives, we have been uprooted from our spiritual traditions, our ancestors, our family, and our society. Many of us, particularly young people, are heading towards a life of consumption and self-destruction.

Ideological wars, AIDS, cancer, mental illness, and alcohol and drug addiction have become major burdens of this century. At the same time, progress in the fields of electronic and biological technology are creating new powers for mankind. In the 21st century, if humans cannot master themselves, these new powers will lead us and other living beings to mass destruction.

During the 20th century many seeds of wisdom have also sprouted. Science, especially physics and biology, has discovered the nature of interconnectedness, interbeing, and non-self. The fields of psychology and sociology have discovered much of these same truths. We know that this is, because that is, and this is like this, because that is like that. We know that we will live together or die together, and that without understanding, love is impossible.

From these insights, many positive efforts have recently been made. Many of us have worked to take care of the environment, to care for animals in a compassionate way, to reduce the consumption of meat, to abandon smoking and drinking alcohol, to do social relief work in underdeveloped countries, to campaign for peace and human rights, to promote simple living and consumption of health food, and to learn the practice of Buddhism as an art of living, aimed at transformation and healing. If we are able to recognize these positive developments of wisdom and action, they will become a bright torch of enlightenment, capable of showing mankind the right path to follow in the 21st century. Science and technology can then be reoriented to help build a new way of life moving in the direction of a living insight, as expressed in terms of interconnectedness, interbeing, and non-self.

If the 20th century was the century of humans conquering Nature, the 21st century should be one in which we conquer the root causes of the suffering in human beings—our fears, ego, hatred, greed, etc. If the 20th century was characterized by individualism and consumption, the 21st century can be characterized by the insights of interbeing. In the 21st century, humans can live together in true harmony with each other and with nature, as bees live together in their bee hive or as cells live together in the same body, all in a real spirit of democracy and equality. Freedom will no longer be just a kind of liberty for self-destruction, or destruction of the environment, but the kind of freedom that protects us from being overwhelmed and carried away by craving, hatred, and pain.

The art of mindful living expressed in concrete terms, as found in the Five Mindfulness Trainings, can be the way for all of us. The Trainings point us in the right direction for the 21st century. Returning to one's root spiritual tradition, we can find and restore the equivalent values and insights. This is a most urgent task for us all.

I respectfully propose to all Venerable Monks, Nuns, and Lay people within our Tù Hieu lineage, in Vietnam and outside of Vietnam, to carefully reflect upon the following recommendations, and to contribute some part in helping to create the direction for mankind in the New Century:

1. We should continue to set up monasteries and practice centers. These centers can organize retreats—one day, three days, seven days, twenty-one days, ninety days, etc.—for monastics and for lay people, aimed at developing our capacity for transformation and healing. Activities at these centers should cultivate understanding and compassion and teach the art of Sangha building. Temples and practice centers should embody a true spiritual life, and should be places where young people can get in touch with their spiritual roots. They should be centers where the practice of non-attachment to views according to the Mindfulness Trainings of the Order of Interbeing can be experienced. To cultivate tolerance according to these trainings will prevent our country and mankind from getting caught in future cycles of religious and ideological wars.

2. We should study and practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings in the context of a family, and establish our family as the basic unit for a larger Sangha. Practicing deep listening and mindful speech, we will create harmony and happiness, and feel rooted in our own family. Each family should set up a home altar for spiritual and blood ancestors. On important days, the entire family should gather to cultivate the awareness and appreciation of their roots and



origins, thus deepening their consciousness of these spiritual and blood ancestors. Accepting the stream of ancestors in our own being, we draw on their strengths and recognize their weaknesses, in order to transform generations of suffering. Each family should recognize the importance of having one member of their family devote his or her life to the learning and practice of the Dharma, as a monastic or a lay person. The family should invest in, support, and encourage this family member.

3. We should give up our lives of feverish consumption, and transfer all merits of action created by thoughts, speech, and work to the Sangha. Our happiness should arise from understanding, compassion, and harmony, and not from consumption. We should see the happiness of the Sangha as our own happiness.

4. We should invest the time and energy of our daily life in the noble task of Sangha building. We should share material things that can be used collectively by the Sangha, such as houses, cars, television, computers, etc. We should give up alcohol, drugs, and smoking. We should learn to live simply, so that we may have more time to live our daily life deeply and with freedom. Living simply, we become capable of touching the wonders of life, of transformation and healing, and of realizing our ideal of compassion in the educational, cultural, spiritual, and social domains of our lives.

The 21st century is a green, beautiful hill with an immense space, having stars, moons, and all wonders of life. Let us climb the hill of the next century, not as separate individuals but as a Sangha.

Let us go together, hand in hand, with our spiritual and blood ancestors, and our children. Let us enjoy the climb together with our songs and our smiles, and allow each step to create freedom and joy and peace.

Wishing you and your Sangha a wonderful century full of faith and happiness,

Thich Nhat Hanh

Elder of the Tu Hieu Lineage

## Be Like the Earth — The Practice of Forbearance

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on **July 23, 1996** in Plum Village, France.

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Good morning, dear friends.

Today is the twenty-third of July, 1996, and we are in the Upper Hamlet.

Two days ago in a Dharma talk in English, I asked the children to name that room in our modern home where we can have peace, where we can practice peace, where we can restore our peace. About fourteen years ago I called it a "breathing room," but there must be better names for that room. Of course in that room we can practice breathing and restoring ourselves. But I guess that the children can help propose a beautiful name for that room. Those who are new arrivals should be told a little bit about that.

We said that in our home there is a room for everything—like a guest room, a room for eating, a room for playing, a room for sitting and watching television—but we need a room where we can be really at peace. No one can shout at us when we go into that room. When the atmosphere in the family is not light, is difficult to bear, we can always have some place to go to be ourselves. No one can pursue us into that room in order to continue asking questions, or saying things that we don't want to listen to. We may call it the "Embassy of the Buddha," where you can seek asylum. We can call it the "territory of peace," the "Pure Land," the "meditation corner." Please come up with some better name that fits.

When we look at the village, we see there is a church or a temple in the village. That church or temple plays the role of spiritual leadership. It used to be a higher building than the other houses, and it was surrounded with trees and so on. And we used to think of it with love, with peace, because we knew that when we went there, we could be rid of the annoying things of everyday life. But somehow the church or the temple has lost the role of leadership. Many of us don't feel comfortable anymore when we think of the church or of the temple. Whose fault is that? We should not blame anyone in particular. We are co-responsible for that. A church not playing well the role of a church, a temple not playing well the role of a temple, that is our responsibility. We have to restore the spiritual leadership of a church, of the temple. But do we have the right and the power to do so? We are not the church people. We are not the temple people. Can we decide how to rearrange the church and the temple so that it will fit our spiritual need? Because in our daily life we need peace, we need harmony, we need quiet, we need communion—but they no longer provide us with that. Of course, we may have the right to speak out, that we need this and that.

But in our home of the twenty-first century—we still have four years to prepare for our modern home. At least we have that room in our home to play the role of leadership. We talked about the furniture in that room, we talked about a few cushions, we talked about a little table with a little flower pot, we talked about a little bell so that we can practice breathing and calming ourselves. To me, a civilized home should have such a room. It is the heart of our home. Everyone in the family has to sign an agreement, a treaty, that the space of the room should not be violated by anyone, including the father, the mother. Once you enter the room there is no right to shout, there is no right to have rough words or gestures, because that is the territory of mindfulness, that is the territory of peace, and everyone has to show his or her reverence, respect. Because if we lose that respect and reverence, then there is nothing left. So please help find a name that fits that room. It will play the role of the church and the temple in our home. We will learn how to maintain that room, how to arrange that room, how to practice in that room, so that peace and harmony in our new home become something real—for the sake of all of us. The children already have discussed this, and I ask you to continue it today.

We also discussed the green space so that many houses in the area can profit—a kind of garden, a kind of Buddha garden. You might like to call it a Sangha garden. Because the central park is too big—the central park is for the whole city. We are talking about a little park, for a group of houses only. Because if each house has got to have a room that represents

the territory of peace, then the hamlet—a group of houses, like fifteen, twenty, or thirty houses—should possess a space, green, natural, where the harmony of nature should be respected. I propose that in that mini-park there is a playground for children, a space where children can jump and run. Because we do need it, and it is a pleasure for people like me to sit and watch the children running and shouting and playing. We need that very much.

And then there should be a path for walking meditation. Every home needs to have such a path. When you are engaged on the path of walking meditation, you have the right to walk slowly, and in silence. A group of houses should make a kind of agreement on how to maintain and use that little communal park. I cannot survive without the path of walking meditation, I am so used to it. It's like food. If I have no time, no chance, no place to practice walking every day, I don't feel completely happy. I can be happy, but my happiness is not perfect. The walking has become part of my daily life. Every time I have five or ten minutes, I like to use it for walking meditation. Each step brings me a lot of joy. During the walk I pay attention to nature, to every creature that is there—a butterfly, a snail, a little flower, a dry ripe leaf. I don't want to call it a dead leaf. I like to call it a "ripe" leaf.

And I like to see mother taking the hand of daughter, practicing walking meditation, teaching daughter to breathe in and out, to calm her emotions. I would like to see father taking the hand of son, walking meditation. I would like to see them sitting on the grass together, practicing looking at the blue sky, smiling. We don't need to be riding in a motor car very quickly in order to enjoy life. We can just sit. I guess riding in a motor car is fine, but you might disturb people if the sound of the motor car is too big. And you risk polluting the air and you may reduce the happiness of other people, because you make the quality of the air poorer. So we have to be mindful. In that space of nature, of harmony, we should delegate members of the community who know how to maintain the harmony and the beauty of the little park, for the pleasure of everyone. We should make our walking meditation path beautiful, available to everyone. I hope there are several paths for walking meditation because I do wish that every house, every family, will at least have the opportunity to practice walking meditation every day.

After having worked for one hour, one hour and a half—whether manual work or intellectual work—I always like and need walking meditation outdoors. Yesterday, I had one article to edit. I like editing an article—I like words, I like grammar, I like ideas, I like images, I like poetry—yes. But after about one hour of being together with a pencil (I still don't use a computer yet) and the sheet of paper, I looked up through the window and I saw that young palm tree, so beautiful it looks like it just came out fresh from paradise. It's so appealing that I said, "Although I like editing, the nature outside is so inviting." So my heart vibrated with happiness—I saw that the Pure Land, that paradise, is available. I was like a child. I wanted to come and touch the palm tree.

I have to tell you a little bit of the story of that palm tree: I was in Germany and practicing cleaning my intestines together with other friends. I was fasting several days, just drinking herb tea. One night I saw myself practicing walking in a beautiful park. I was made very mindful during the dream. I touched the bark of the trees mindfully, and enjoyed every detail of the bark of the trees. At one point, I was walking along a path where the vegetation is very green, very young palm trees of this height on my left, and I stopped, and I looked, and I said, "This green is so beautiful, so deep," and I was using my finger and touching it, mindfully. You know something? Mindfulness is possible in dreams. If you practice mindfulness, if you continue, there will be a time when you also practice mindfulness in dreams. And you enjoy it.

I remember a Zen master in China one day brought a number of visitors to visit the garden of the temple and he pointed to a bush, and he told his visitors, "Ladies and gentlemen: people of our time, when they look at these leaves and flowers, they look at them as if they are in a dream." When I practice walking meditation, especially in the woods, I practice touching and looking at the vegetation in such a way that these things cannot be in a dream, should not, could not, be in a dream. And I have succeeded. That even in a dream, the bark of the tree, the

palm tree, have become real also. So when I woke up I said, "The young palm tree in my dream is so beautiful." I told myself that when I go back to France I would like to plant a palm tree, plant it in my garden. Three days after I return to France, I went to the nursery and I found a very beautiful young palm tree, so I asked her to come to my garden.

[Bell]

I planted it in a place where I can see it a lot of times during the day. Every time I stop my work of editing, I look out and I see it. It is part of my Sangha, reminding me to be happy, to enjoy every moment of my daily life. So in that park, in that little park that belongs to the Sangha of new homes—about twenty or thirty homes—we should have a palm tree like that, or any kind of tree that you like to treat the way I treat my palm tree. You should rely on friends in the neighborhood who know how to talk to trees, how to take good care of trees, how to make trees into friends, members of our Sangha, how to arrange a beautiful walking meditation path. And there should be a place where we can sit down—just sit down. We don't need to talk or anything. If you know how to sit down, you'll be happy enough. The other day I talked about Nelson Mandela a week ago in the first Dharma talk of the summer opening. He was visiting France, and he was asked by a reporter what he needed the most. And he said, "The thing I need the most is to sit down. Since the time I got out of prison, I have had no time to sit down." Poor man.

We have come to Plum Village just to sit down. Don't waste your opportunity to sit down. You know how to sit down and not to worry, not to think about doing this or that, to lay down your burdens, your worries, your projects. Just sit down and feel that you are alive—with your son, with your daughter, with your partner, with your Dharma brother or sister. That's enough to be happy. Our sitting in the morning is just for sitting down. Our eating lunch at noon is also for sitting down. The Dharma talk is just an opportunity for us to sit down. So I am happy that the very young people can follow this Dharma talk, because it is very deep.

It is also my desire that in that little communal park, there is also something like a temple or a church, but you don't need to spend a lot of money building it. It must be a place where you can go in and feel protected by the atmosphere and environment. In fact, it is like the breathing room in your home. But now it is not for your family only, it is for twenty or thirty families living in the same area. And because it belongs to different spiritual traditions, that temple, that church, or that meditation hall should not bear any symbol.

There are friends in Florence, in Italy, who propose that they build a temple of peace on a hill of the city. There will be a place without any symbols and people of different spiritual traditions can come and sit together. No liturgy, no chanting, nothing, no statue. But beneath, there may be several halls in where different spiritual traditions can place their symbols—a Buddhist meditation hall, a Catholic praying place, and so on. That is a good idea. But I think in order to build a temple you need a lot of money and I'm not thinking of that. I'm thinking of a beautiful, quiet, simple place where families can come in and sit with other families and offer each other peace, quiet.

Talking about our home in the twenty-first century, we have to be aware of our real need and have to speak out about what we need. We have to talk to our architects, to our government, to our city council for what we need. Imagine a neighborhood where children have no place to go, where people only go to liquor shops and when they go back home, get drunk and shout at each other. There's no communication between families. The black people in that house have no relationship with the white people who live next door. When they meet each other, they don't say hello, there is no relationship at all. The children feel there's no space, no communication. Many children are delinquent, people are not happy with each other in the family and they are not happy with neighbors and you don't feel safe living in such an area. So all these things should be discussed among us who live in the area and we have to rearrange our way of life, as families and as communities.

[Bell]

You may like to discuss this in order to bring our collective insight to organizing our homes in the twenty-first century. During the past week the children have been given teachings on

how to breathe, how to practice sitting meditation, practice pebble meditation, and walking meditation.

Another practice we have learned is the practice of calling the names of some people we love. We select, say, five people that we love very much. We know that every time we call his or her name we feel happy, we feel the freshness, we feel the love. That practice is called "mindfulness of calling." For instance you love David. David is very close to you. You know about David. You know about his quality. You remember his smile. You remember his nice words. You remember his tenderness. So in the sitting position, while you breathe in, you call his name, "David." Mindful calling. You don't have to call it out loud. Just call him in your spirit, "David." Call his name in such a way that he becomes very real to you in that moment. Even if he's not there, if he's in North America, in Japan, yet he becomes very real to you in that moment, just one in-breath. Your success depends on how concentrated you are, how much you are interested in David's presence. That is why I ask you to select first the person you love the most. She may be your mommy, or your brother, or your best friend. And then when you breathe out you smile and you say, "Here I am." So in-breath is for calling him or her—to make him or her be real in the present moment. And during your out-breath you smile to him and you say, "Here I am." You bring yourself back entirely into the present moment—you and he, you and she, are real in the moment. That is the practice of mindfulness of calling.

There are those of us who want to call the Buddha—mindfulness of the calling of the Buddha. Maybe it is a little more difficult to call the Buddha if you are not very familiar with the Buddha. There are ways of practice so that we can see the Buddha in a very real way, as a person. Remember, Buddha is not a god. Buddha is just a human person like us. Every time I call the name of the Buddha, I really touch him, I really see him as someone very close to me. It's like when I call your name. The Buddha appears to me, very real, like yourself, like myself. It's like when I call the name of the full moon. When I look up at the full moon, I know that the full moon is there. And I want only to focus my attention, my whole attention, on the presence of the full moon. So I take an in-breath and I say, "full moon." And then full moon suddenly reveals herself to me very clearly. There's only the full moon at that moment. And when I breathe out, I smile and say, "Thank you for being there." So I and the full moon were very real in that moment. And I repeat, I do it two, three, four times, and my happiness increases all the time. I feel very alive in that moment.

So in your sitting meditation a time may be used just to call a few names in mindfulness. No matter who the person is—the person whose name you call, no matter who he or she is—mindfulness is always mindfulness. You might think that when you call the Buddha your mindfulness is more mindful. That's not true. Even if you call the full moon, mindfulness is true mindfulness. And mindfulness—guess what it is? Mindfulness is the Buddha. You don't need to call the Buddha in order for mindfulness to be the Buddha. Even if you call the snail or the dandelion or the full moon, your mindfulness is still the Buddha. The energy of mindfulness is the energy of the Buddha. So call your mother's name, and the Buddha is there with your mother at the same time. I said mother is a kind of Buddha and Buddha is a kind of mother. Buddha is a kind of moon and moon is a kind of Buddha. It's wonderful! And there is the name of someone that you should try to call sometime later. That person needs you very much and you have very often forgotten her, forgotten him. And that person is yourself. Call your name and smile to him, smile to her. It's very important. You have neglected him, you have been neglecting him a lot. He has suffered quite a lot. You have neglected her very much. She has been suffering, she needs your attention, your mindfulness, your embracing her with mindfulness. You've got to call her name, with compassion, with love.

You are welcome to stand up and to bow to the Sangha before you go out, but today I'm going to tell a very beautiful story in the Dharma talk. If you are interested, you might like to come back.

[Children leave Dharma hall]

Rahula is the son of the Buddha. A few years after enlightenment, the Buddha went back to his hometown, Kapilavastu, and visited his family. He was received by the king, his father, Siddhodana. He came back with many of his disciples—monks (at that time there were no nuns yet). He gave a beautiful Dharma talk to his father in the palace. The Dharma talk was attended by several informed people in the government, in the royal families, including his former friends. Siddhartha had a lot of friends before he left home and became a monk. Rahula was eight and Rahula was missing his father. That is why when the Buddha went back to his quarters in the vicinity of Kapilavastu with his monks, Rahula wanted to accompany him. Rahula loved the presence, the company of the Buddha, and he didn't want to go home. He wanted to stay in a monastery. One day he said, "Buddha, I want to live with you, I don't want to go home." Buddha said, "Okay." He told his disciple Shariputra to ordain Rahula as a novice. The grandpa was very angry because his son had become a monk, and now his grandson also was made a novice. But little Rahula was so happy living close to the Buddha and he practiced very well with the community of monks. When Rahula was eighteen, the Buddha gave him a very beautiful Dharma talk. I would like to share with you that Dharma talk today. The venerable Shariputra was there, standing behind the Buddha, and he listened to the Dharma talk and he received it very deeply, and he practiced it very deeply, even though the Dharma talk was given to a very young monk—Rahula.

In that Dharma talk, the Buddha advised Rahula to practice being the earth, the great earth. The Buddha said, "Rahula, practice so that you'll be like the earth." People might throw on the earth things like perfume, excrement, urine, all the dirty things, but the earth always receives all of that without anger. No matter whether it is the perfume or jewels or gold or silver or flowers or garbage or dirt or excrement or urine, the earth receives all of that without any resentment, any anger, because the earth is great, is large. The earth has the power to transform all these. You have a dead mouse in your kitchen. You want to get rid of it—where do you put it? You throw it to the earth. In no time at all, the earth transforms the dead mouse into something that you can accept. The earth has a great power of transformation, because the earth is great. So practice so that your heart becomes as great as the earth. You suffer only if you are small, if your heart is small. But when your heart is expanded you don't have to suffer. You don't need to make an effort to bear the suffering.

The other day I started with the image of a water container. It can contain something like fifty liters and if you throw something dirty into that container then you cannot drink that water any more—you have to throw the whole thing away. But if you throw that dirt on a big river, the river is immense, and the river water is still drinkable. In no time at all, the river with all the water and the mud transforms the dirt you throw into it, and everything will be perfect again. And the whole city continues to drink the water from the river. It's not that the river has to bear. We're talking about forbearance, endurance—as a boat to carry you to the other shore—*shanti-paramita*, "crossing to the other shore," the shore of happiness, joy, and liberation by the boat of forbearance.

If you make your heart as large as the earth then you can accept anything people do to you and say to you, without suffering. But if your heart is small, you suffer a lot. So Rahula practiced to be like the earth. That is the practice of love called the Four Immeasurable Minds. Because with the practice, your heart is growing and growing and growing, larger and larger all the time. And your heart will embrace everything, everyone—no enemy at all, there's no enemy. Every time we praise the Buddha, we say, "Dear Buddha, your heart is so big and you embrace every living being with your heart, your compassion encircles the whole of the cosmos." Whether you call them friend or enemy, it's the same when your heart is big, you embrace them all, you love them all—whether they are cruel or less cruel, they are equally the object of your compassion.

So if you are a student of the Buddha try to practice so that your heart grows larger every day, and you won't have to suffer. Even if they say very mean and very cruel things to you, if they do cruel things to you, even if they try to suppress you and to kill you. How can you kill a river? How can you kill the earth? It is so huge. Some dirt cannot destroy the river because

the river is so big. "Rahula, practice so that you will be like the water. Whether people throw into the water flowers, fragrance, food, milk, or urine or excrement or dead bodies of animals, the water will receive all without rancor, without resentment, without hatred; because the water has the capacity of washing everything. You can wash the bowl of the Buddha with the water, but you can wash also the dirty cloth, someone full of blood, the water receives everything and the water can wash everything, transform everything. So Rahula, please practice so that your heart will become something like water, you can receive everything without resentment and rancor.

"Rahula, practice like fire. Whether you throw into fire cloth or paper or flowers or dirty things, the fire accepts all and burns all. Whether it is fragrant or whether it stinks the fire accepts all and the fire reduces everything to ash and smoke. Because fire has the power to transform. Rahula, practice being like air. Whether you throw into the air something fragrant or something smelling bad, whether you burn incense or whether you burn rubber, the air accepts all because the air has the power to transform, because air is huge." The Buddha was instructing the young monk Rahula. But Shariputra, the tutor of Rahula, was standing there and absorbing every word of the Buddha and he was practicing that teaching for many, many years.

[Bell]

With the practice of mindful breathing, with the practice of looking deeply, you develop the four elements of your heart. And these four elements of your heart will expand your heart to infinity so that your heart will be like the heart of the Buddha, capable of embracing the whole cosmos. The four elements are *maitri*, which is loving kindness; *karuna*, which in English means "compassion," *mudita*, which means "joy"— your practice should be joyful, otherwise it's not true practice; and finally, *upeksha*, equanimity—*upeksha* means "no discrimination." You love because the other person needs you, not because he is your countryman or he belongs to the same religion you do. No discrimination at all, that is true love.

One day, after finishing his rains retreat, the venerable Shariputra wanted to go north to visit another community that he had to care for. After he was gone, another monk went to the Buddha and complained about Shariputra: "My Lord, Shariputra is unbearable. He is too arrogant. I hate him. You trust him, you love him so much. But he is not worth your love and your trust. He plays too important a role in the Sangha. He teaches so many young monks and he has so much influence in the Sangha and that is not good for you, Lord, and not for him either. You know, my Lord, this morning when he was going out with his bowl I asked him, 'Shariputra, where are you going?' He didn't say anything. He did not even answer me. And with his left hand he pushed me and I fell to the ground, and he did not apologize, he just went out."

You know, Shariputra was the object of a lot of jealousy. Because he was so important a teacher, he was loved and appreciated by the Buddha. Shariputra is there, today, object of jealousy, object of anger, of hatred. I guess in his daily life Shariputra received a lot of things like that but fortunately he practices. The Buddha said, "When did Shariputra leave?" Ananda said, "Just this morning, my Lord. A few hours ago." "Could anyone go after him and ask him to come back, we would like to see him?" Then a novice was sent by Ananda to go after Shariputra and to invite him back.

That afternoon Shariputra was back again at the Jeta monastery and the Buddha asked Ananda to convene a meeting of the Sangha. You can see Ananda holding a bunch of keys and going to each door and knocking, "Brothers, brother, come to tonight, there will be an important meeting." Then when everyone was there, the Buddha opened his mouth and spoke: "Bhikshu Shariputra, a brother of yours said this morning that when you were leaving the gate of the monastery he asked you where you were going, but you didn't care to answer him and then you pushed him, he fell to the floor, and you just continued your way without apologizing. Is that true?"

This is the answer offered by Shariputra. The answers of Shariputra have been recorded and became a sutra, and the sutra we call *The Lions Roar of Shariputra*. I will read to you a few lines. "Lord, you remember the lesson you gave fourteen years ago to the young Bhikshu Rahula, he was only eighteen years old at the time. You taught him to contemplate the nature of earth, water, fire, and air in order to nourish and develop the four virtues of loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. Although your teaching was directed at Rahula, I learned from it also. I had made efforts to observe that teaching throughout the past fourteen years, and I have often thanked you in my heart.

"Lord, I have tried to practice to be more like earth. Earth is wide and open and has the capacity to receive and transform. Whether people toss pure and fragrant substances such as flowers, perfume, or fresh milk upon the earth, or toss unclean and foul-smelling substances such as excrement, urine, blood, mucous, and spit, on it, the earth receives it all equally with neither grasping nor aversion. Lord, I have contemplated to make my mind and body more like the earth. A monk who does not contemplate the body in the body, who is not mindful of the actions of the body, such a monk could knock down a brother monk and leave him without apologizing. Such is not my way.

"Lord, I have practiced to be more like water. Whether someone pours fragrant substances or defiled substances into water, the water receives them both without grasping or aversion. Water is immense and flowing and has the capacity to transform and to purify. Respected Buddha, I have contemplated to make my body and mind more like water. A monk who does not contemplate the body in the body, who is not mindful of the actions of the body, such a monk could knock down a brother monk and leave him without apologizing. Such is not my way.

"Lord, I have practiced to be more like fire. Fire burns all things, the beautiful as well as the impure, without grasping or aversion. Fire has the ability to burn, purify, and transform. My Lord, I have contemplated to make my body and mind more like fire. A monk who does not practice mindfulness of the body in the body, mindfulness of the actions of the body, such a monk could knock down a brother monk and leave him without apologizing. I am not such a monk.

"Lord, I have practiced to be more like air. The air carries all manner of smells, good and bad, without grasping or aversion. Air has the capacity to transform, purify, and release. Lord, I have contemplated to make my body and mind become more like air. A monk who does not practice mindfulness of the body in the body, who is not mindful of the actions of his body, such a monk could knock down a brother monk and leave him without apologizing. Such is not my way.

"Lord, like a small, Untouchable child, with tattered, torn cloth who clasps a bowl and begs in the street for scraps of food, I practice to hold no false pride or arrogance. I have tried to make my heart like the heart of an Untouchable child's heart. I have tried to practice humility, not daring to place myself higher than others. My Lord, a monk who does not contemplate the body in the body, who is not mindful of his actions and his speech, such a monk could knock down a fellow monk and leave him without apologizing. I am not a monk like that."

The venerable Shariputra continued speaking like that, but his accuser could bear it no longer. The other monk stood up and took away a piece of his sanghati robe to show his shoulder and bowed to the Buddha and joined his palms and he confessed, "Lord Buddha, I have violated the Precepts. I have born false witness against Shariputra. I confess that I had jealousy, anger, hatred in me. I confess my transgression before you and the entire community. I vow to observe my Precepts better in the future." The Buddha said, "It's good that you have confessed your transgression before the community. We are very glad you have done that." Then Shariputra rose also and he touched the ground in front of the other monk. "I bear no hatred, no anger against my brother and I ask him to forgive anything I may have done to upset him in the past." And both of them practiced Beginning Anew in front of the Buddha. The community saw that Shariputra did really practice in order for his heart to expand like the earth, like the water, like the fire, like the air. No matter what people told him, how mean it



was, no matter how cruel were all the things they did to him, he could accept all of that without rancor, without suffering. That is the practice of true love in Buddhism.

True love consisting of loving kindness—the desire to offer happiness; of compassion—the desire to remove the pain from the other person; the desire to practice *mudita*—joy, to bring joy to people around; and *upeksha*—the desire to accept everything, not to discriminate. You love just because living beings need your love, not because he is your brother or sister, he belongs to your family, or your nation—no discrimination, that is *upeksha*.

[Bell]

If you still suffer, if you still believe that you are the victim of injustice, if you still think that they have wronged you, it means your heart is still not large enough, you have not become quite like air, or earth, or fire, or water. You still want to undo that injustice, to free yourself from injustice. You want the other person to be punished so that you will feel better because you have been the victim of terrible injustice. Injustice is the thing you see everywhere—a two year old child struck with cancer, a baby just born is already crippled, a couple of young people just married and have an accident that kills both. There are so many things like that happening around you. And you look at the sky and you say, "God is cruel. Where is justice? If God is love, if God is just, how could God allow these things to happen?" After having looked for justice from humankind, expecting the government, expecting the military, expecting the fellow human beings to repair the injustice done to you, and you don't succeed, then you have to look at the sky and you cry out your injustice to God.

Lao Tzu, the author of *Tao Te Ching*, said, "Sky and earth are inhuman, they treat living beings like a straw dog." Straw dog—a dog made with straw, just a toy. When you look closely at things, at people, at living beings, you see so much suffering, you see so much injustice you cannot explain, and you blame sky and earth, you blame God, you blame the Creator. You see that there are so many people who are good-hearted and who continue to suffer so much and you ask why. Yet you can see many people who are very wicked, very mean, very cruel, unjustly enjoying very special treatment of society. And you revolt against this kind of thing.

In the Buddhist circle they used to explain this kind of injustice by the teaching of cause and effect, in the context of "three times." "Three times" means the past, present, and future. And they quoted this sentence: "If you want to know what kind of goal you have pursued in the past life, just look at yourself in the present life." If in the present life you suffer, it means in the former life you have done a lot of wicked things, cruel things. So if you suffer during this life, it's because you were doing bad things in the former life. Even if in this life you are trying to do good, you still have to suffer because in a past life you have done bad things. If the other person is doing cruel things but is still enjoying his situation, his special treatment, it's because in a former time in his past life he had done good things. That is why he enjoys the fruit of his good karma right now. To know the quality of your life in the future, you just look at the action you are doing in this life. If you are doing good things and if you are not happy yet, be sure that you will be happy in the future.

That is the way they explain in the Buddhist circle, in order to appease a little bit your tendency to revolt against injustice. Injustice, you can see it—a small nation occupied by a big nation for one thousand years; a nation destroyed by another nation with napalm, with defoliants. Millions of people die during a war. Think of the former Yugoslavia—a thousand people liquidated in the name of ethnic purification. The whole world community just stood by and allowed it to continue and continue and continue and continue. You want to revolt. You feel oppressed, you feel you have been the victim of injustice. You want to repair that and you think of military means, political means, because you think that only political means and military means can repair injustice. By trying to repair the situation you may cause a lot of injustice at the same time. *Giai oan* is a Vietnamese term, "to undo injustice." *Giai* means "to untie." Injustice is like a rope binding you tightly and you suffer, and you want to remove that rope, and you naturally think of military means, sheer violence. You want political means to repair injustice. According to the Buddhist practice, the only way to undo the injustice is to

enlarge your heart. Because only compassion, only loving kindness, only understanding, can answer to ignorance, can answer violence, can answer injustice, can answer cruelty.

A child, a charming little boy, catches a butterfly, and he takes the two wings of the butterfly by four fingers and he just tears like that—and the butterfly dies. The little boy laughs with joy. The little boy does not know that by doing that, he is destroying life. One day I saw a little boy doing like that, I told him, "My dear one, do you know that the butterfly has a sister, a mother? Tonight if the butterfly does not fly home, his parents will be very upset, you know that? Don't you know that you are doing a very terrible thing to a butterfly?" And the child understood. From that moment on, he no longer caught butterflies. A few days later, when it was raining, he was collecting snails on the path and putting them back in the bushes, being afraid that if we step on the snails, the snails would not be able to go back to their fathers, their mothers, in the evening. "Lord, forgive him for what he is doing, because he does not know what he is doing." People are cruel, people are doing incredible things to other people because they are just ignorant. They don't know that what they are doing makes themselves suffer, not only the others suffer. They are acting in the name of the future, of happiness—happiness of humankind, happiness of the nations.

You embrace an ideology, a superb, superb ideology, and you want all your friends, all people in your country to unite, to realize the golden world, the utopia, because you are motivated by the desire to make this world beautiful, perfect, with happiness for all people. You are ready to embrace that superb ideology for the sake of your own nation, for the sake of the world community, and you believe that this is the only way for humankind, because that ideology is the cream of human intelligence. You do it out of goodwill. You kill, you exile, you lock them into psychiatric hospitals, you liquidate them, you bury them collectively, by hundreds of people, because of your love of humanity, because of your aspiration for a better future for humanity. "Lord, forgive them, because they don't know what they are doing."

Only when you practice understanding do compassion and loving kindness arise. Only when the nectar of compassion is born in your heart do you begin to stop suffering. There is no other way to undo injustice, except by the practice of deep looking in order to forgive, in order to accept. If your heart is small, it means that you have not practiced, you have not been able to see things. When you see that he, she, the other person, because of ignorance, has done that to you and your beloved one, you no longer blame.

[Bell]

Of course we have suffered, all of us. Not only the Bosnians, but also the Serbs. Not only the Palestinians, but also the Israelis. Both of us have suffered. But they continue to bear hatred, anger toward each other. They think that the only way to undo the injustice is to use political and military means, and they ask our friends to come and help us with these means—political and military forces. We don't know that the way out is love, is compassion. Love and compassion, how could they be possible if we don't open our heart, if we don't open our eyes in order to see that just because we are ignorant we are making each other suffer? Where is the world community? Are you there in order to help us to understand each other? To help us produce the nectar of compassion in our heart? Or are you there in order to support one side against the other and to egg us on to continue the fighting? The interest is not the interest of one side, one nation, one party. The interest is the interest of both, because we inter-are.

In Vietnam we say, "The father eats a lot of salt and it is the son who has to drink a lot of water." What the father does, the son has to bear. We have to inherit the fruit of the actions of our fathers. Why? Is that injustice? Because we are caught in the idea of self. My father did that, not me, why do I have to bear the retribution? But in the light of non-self, you are your father, you are the continuation of your father. If you are a young person and if you suffer, you should learn that you suffer for the sake of your father, your ancestors, and also your society. You have to learn in order to look, and when you say, "I suffer," it's okay: there should be someone who suffers for the sake of his father, for his grandfather, his countrymen. "I suffer, because I love. I suffer for all of them, because they did not know—that is why they have produced a lot of suffering. Now I suffer in order to redeem that kind of wrong doing."

Suddenly you have enough courage in order to continue and to forbear the difficulties. Suddenly your heart opens and suffering is no longer unbearable for you because love is in you.

You know, what you do can make your father or your mother suffer. What you do can make your great-grandchild suffer in the future. That is why mindfulness helps us to stop causing suffering to the people we love and to ourselves. A child who at two years old gets a terrible sickness—who is responsible? You cannot say, "Dear little child, you suffer like that because in your former life you have done a terrible thing." You cannot say that. Who did the terrible thing so that the child has to suffer today? All of us—that is non-self. We belong to the same reality. There is a stream of life.

If you continue to sit there and to blame and to hate your parents, that means you have not practiced looking deeply. The better way is to sit down with your parents, to reconsider the situation, to look deeply in order to see how the suffering has come into being and how we can end the *samsara* and the vicious circle of suffering for our sake and for the sake of our children and grandchildren. Understanding opens the door of the heart. Suddenly we are able to accept each other because our heart has grown large thanks to the practice of looking deeply.

## **Transcending Injustice: The Tale of Quan Am Thi Kinh**

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 28, 1996 in Plum Village, France.

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Dear friends.

Today is the twenty-eighth of July, 1996, we are in the Lower Hamlet and we are going to speak English.

There was a little girl whose name was Kinh, who was born in North Vietnam a long, long time ago. Her parents would have preferred a boy, but a girl was born to them, but they were still happy and they named her Kinh. Kinh means "respect, reverence." That is a very good name. You respect people, you respect animals, you respect life including the plants and the minerals. Reverence. Reverence for life, for what is there inside of you and around you. Kinh was a very beautiful child. As a little girl she was already very beautiful, like a flower. Kinh used to go the Buddhist temple in the village with her mother to offer lotus flowers to the Buddha and to listen to the Dharma talks given by the high monk. She loved the Dharma.

There was a very deep intention in her to become something like a monk, because she saw the monks living their lives very happily and helping so many people. She wished that she could become a monk, because practicing, living in the temple—everything—seemed to be very beautiful and calm. She loved the manner of the monks, going back and forth with gentleness, touching everything with reverence. She just loved the Dharma, even though she was very small. She inquired about the possibility of becoming a monk, and they said no, not for girls. Because Buddhism had just been introduced into Vietnam, there were only monasteries for monks; perhaps there were one or two temples for nuns, but they were very rare. In that time, there was no airplane, there was no bus, so she could not imagine that she could travel far. She was not happy at the idea that she could never become a monk because she was a girl. A kind of frustration was in her—she believed that as a girl one could also practice like a monk, living the Dharma happily like a monk.

She grew up into a beautiful girl and her parents wanted to marry her to someone in the neighborhood. In olden times, weddings were arranged by parents, and you had to obey them because they had their wisdom, they knew who was good for you. The deepest desire of parents was to see their daughter be wedded to a young man with a bright future. One morning they received a letter from the parents of a young man, asking whether they can marry her to their son. The young man's name was Sung Tin—"scholar of goodness," "student of goodness." I don't know how good he was, how bright a human he was, but it seemed that he was born into a family of outstanding tradition, a noble family. He seemed to have a bright future, because he was a good student and he might pass the examination and become a high official in the government. The dream of all students in the past was to pass the high exam and be selected by the king to be a minister, a chief of province, and so on.

Kinh had to obey them to become the wife of Sung Tin, although her love, her deepest desire, was to become a nun. There was no way at all; it was not like in our time. In our time, if a young lady wants to become a nun, she might pick up the telephone and inquire about the existence of nunneries. But in that time Kinh did not have any opportunity to do so. So she buried her desire deep inside and had to obey her parents and be wedded to that young man, Sung Tin. Of course the young wife had to support her husband in his studies. Nourishing the husband, supporting the husband so that the husband can succeed in his studies was the main task of a young wife of that time.

The family of Sung Tin was rich, so Kinh did not have to work very hard to support her husband. There were, however, many young wives who had to sell rice in a market or carry rice in the heat of the summertime in order to earn enough money to support their husbands to continue their studies. This was not the case of Kinh because her in-law family was very rich. So she only took care of the housework, cleaned, cooked, sewed his clothes, and so on. Kinh was trained very thoroughly as a housekeeper by her parents. One day while she was mending some cloth, her husband Sung Tin was studying beside her and fell asleep. Students want to

study as much as possible, they want to stuff in as many books and as much knowledge as possible. So he was trying to do the same thing. He studied day and night, and that day, reading a book close to his wife, he fell asleep.

When Kinh looked at Sung Tin, she saw that a few moustache hairs were not cut evenly. So out of her love and care she used a pair of scissors, trying to trim those three or four hairs. But suddenly her husband woke up. And in that kind of state of being, he thought that she was trying to kill him! So he shouted, he screamed. He screamed. I don't know how deep their love was, how much they understood each other, but this is what happened. So his parents came and asked, "Why are you screaming like that?" He said, "Well, I was dozing. When I woke up, I saw her using a pair of scissors like that. So I don't know." His parents said, "It does happen that wives who are not faithful may kill their husband, because it's in their mind to have other desires, other men. So we don't want you any more as a daughter-in-law. We'd like to send you back to your home." Kinh tried to explain, but the parents did not want to accept.

When I practiced looking deeply into this, I saw that the cause of her being dismissed as a daughter-in-law was not suspicion, but jealousy. Since the time the young man married he spent all of his time with his wife, and the parents felt that they had lost their son. This new woman who came to their home monopolized entirely their son so they acted on this kind of jealousy without even knowing it. So they wrote a letter to her parents and asked them to come and take back their daughter. Imagine how great was the suffering undergone by that family. To them their daughter was perfect, their daughter was very true, very faithful. It was a kind of injustice. And that was the first injustice that Kinh had to suffer, to bear, to accept. So they brought her home. Her parents believed her that she did not have the intention to kill her husband. It was just a misfortune, and the three of them suffered.

[Bell]

But Kinh had learned something from the conjugal life. She saw that people are full of wrong perceptions. Even in that wealthy family, they made each other suffer very much. The love that she felt in that family was not enough to make her happy, to make her bloom like a flower. That kind of love, that kind of life, did not satisfy her deepest need. So the idea of becoming a nun suddenly re-emerged. She spent many nights thinking of how to become a monk in order to practice in a Buddhist temple, so that she would be able to embrace the Dharma entirely and devote her life to the practice of the Dharma.

One night she decided that she would disguise herself as a young man and try to be accepted by a monastery. She did not think that she should go to a temple close to her family, because people would recognize her and her parents would not allow her to go. She decided to go far away because there were temples everywhere. She had to walk something like one hundred miles in order to go so far that even her parents would not know where she was. And she did not tell her friends that she wanted to become a monk. Because if she did, her parents would go looking for her in the temples and would very soon discover her. She kept her desire very secret.

One day she just disappeared with some of her belongings and left behind a letter that said, "Dear Mother, dear Father, I have something I love very much I want to accomplish. So please forgive me for not being able to be home to take care of you, because this desire in me is so big." You know that desire was *bodhicitta*—the desire to practice the Dharma and to bring happiness to many people, because people suffer so much everywhere and are caught up in their wrong perceptions; they do injustices to each other every day. She didn't want to repeat that kind of life again, she wanted to become a monk. So after having walked more than one hundred miles, she found a temple—a temple named Phap Van, Dharma Cloud, not very far from Hanoi.

When she came to the temple disguised as a young man, as a student, she asked to see the abbot. She attended the Dharma talk and was so moved that she waited until the people all went home, approached the monk, and asked to be ordained as a novice monk. The monk asked her to sit down and he said, "Young man, why do you want to become a monk?" And

she said, "Dear teacher, I have seen that everything is impermanent, that nothing can last forever. Everything is like a dream, everything is like the flash of lightning. When I looked at a cloud in the sky, first I saw the cloud having the form of a dog, and in no time at all, the form of dog is transformed. I saw the cloud now in the form of a shirt. Everyone is trying to get fame and profit and money in the world and they don't seem to be really happy. I want to have true happiness, and I believe that only in the Dharma could I find peace and happiness." After having said that, she stayed quiet and the monk congratulated her, "Young man, you have understood the teaching of impermanence and I hope you succeed in the practice as a monk." So he allowed her to stay in the temple, and three months later she was ordained as a novice monk.

Her Dharma name was Kinh Tam. He retained the name Kinh, "reverence," and he added the name Tam is "the heart." Reverence of the Heart or The Heart of Reverence. My students all bear the Dharma name "heart." "Source of the heart," "Door of the heart," everything is "of the heart." So they share some of the new novice's name.

Kinh Tam practiced very well, very diligently. She was very intelligent. She studied, she learned the sutras very quickly and she enjoyed very much the life of a young monk. Her teacher loved her very much and he always believed that this was a young man. The young novice was very handsome. Although she was disguised as a young man, although she did not wear anything—gold or perfume and things like that—she was still very handsome as a young "monk," and that drew a danger to her. Because down in the village there was the daughter of the wealthiest family, who would come to the temple every fortnight to offer incense, flowers, and so on, with her mother. The first time she saw the young monk, she fell in love with him right away.

I don't think that it was because of his face; his face was beautiful, yes. But there was something more than the appearance of a young man. The young monk practiced mindfulness very well—we have to call her "he"—he practiced walking mindfully, drinking mindfully, doing everything mindfully. And that is why he looked very beautiful. Because people in society are not that beautiful; they are always in a hurry, they only run, they only do things quickly, they don't have that freedom, that relaxation, that kind of peace that is expressed through the way you look, through the way you do things, through the way you sit down, through the way you walk. And that is why the young lady fell in love with the young monk right away.

Her name is Mau. Mau means "color." What color, I don't know. I don't blame her. I don't blame her because the monk was very beautiful. You can call him "handsome," but he was more than handsome, he was beautiful because he had peace within him. So if there is a lady who falls in love with a monk, that is not something extraordinary, that does happen. I remember there was one time a man who came to Plum Village and who asked Sister Jina, "You are such a beautiful lady, why have you become a nun? That is a pity, that is a loss." After some silence Sister Jina said, "If you see me as beautiful, it is because I have become a nun. If I had not become a nun, I would not be as agreeable, as pleasant as you may see."

That is true, when you become a monk or a nun, you become much more beautiful. You adorn yourself with peace, with mindfulness, with the practice of the Dharma, and that is why you emanate that kind of beauty that is rare in society. So I really don't blame Mau at all. If I was Mau, I would fall in love with the young novice also. She tried to talk to him, tried to find opportunities to be alone with the young monk, Kinh Tam. But Kinh Tam always seemed to avoid her; it was very frustrating. Sometimes she tried to guess in advance the way the young monk would go, and run to wait for him, but when he saw her, he would turn and go into another direction. She tried several times to express her love to the young monk, but he was very determined to continue practicing as a monk.

She was very frustrated. She did not know how to transform her love. She did not understand the Dharma. She only practiced Buddhism in a very shallow way—going to the temple, offering a lot of bananas, sweet rice, and flowers and doing a lot of prostrations. She did not know how to practice in order to take care of her desire, her anger, and so on. When you go to

the temple, you have to learn the Dharma. You have to change yourself in the practice of the Dharma and not do like Mau. Her love for him was so deep, and she was deeply frustrated. That is why, one day, when her parents were not home, she called into her room the young man who worked as a servant, an attendant, in the family. He took care of the garden and the housework, and during the night—I think it was a full moon night—she could not bear her love any more. So she called him in and she allowed him to have sexual intercourse with her, and during the act she imagined the young man as the young novice. It was stated in the story very clearly that in that state of being half awake, she imagined the young man as the beautiful novice.

The accident happened. And a few months later she felt that she was pregnant. She tried to hide it from her father and mother, but it became more and more apparent. The parents asked, "Why are you like that my daughter? You don't want to eat anything, you refuse eating rice, you eat only very sour things." She said, "No, I am perfectly all right, my parents. I just don't feel well enough in my body, that's all. Maybe my blood needs purification." But in a few days, she was summoned by the council of the village together with her parents, because in the village they had noticed that the young lady without a husband had become pregnant. They set up a kind of court and asked her to tell them with whom she had slept in order to become pregnant like that.

So she thought for a long time: "The young man was already chased away. Even if I tell the truth, people wouldn't believe me. The head of the village said that I should tell them the truth, and if I name the young man, I will have the opportunity to have him as an official husband. Why don't I tell them that the man who slept with me is the novice Kinh Tam practicing in the Phap Van temple?" So she said, "Respected elders, I used to go to the temple and I fell in love with the young novice Kinh Tam over there. And both of us could not bear our love not being fulfilled, that is why we have made the mistake. So please forgive us."

The head of the village sent someone to summon the family of the temple: the monk, the novice, and a few other people from the temple. When Kinh Tam arrived, she was told that Mau had declared that "he" had slept with her and made her pregnant, and the head of council said, "Kinh Tam, young novice, you have already decided to become a monk, why didn't you practice the precepts? You have slept with a young woman in the village. What do you have to say?" And the young monk said, "No, I practiced my precept. I never slept with anyone in the village. Please reconsider. This is injustice. Please be understanding. Please have compassion. I have not done anything like that." But when the head of the village turned toward Mau, she continued to confirm that it was the young monk who had slept with her and caused her to be pregnant. And the young novice firmly denied this. "No, as a young monk I practice deeply my precepts. I have never done that. The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha are witness to my honesty."

Finally, they had to use whips. "You have to tell the truth, otherwise you will be beaten with a whip thirty times. You have to confess that you have slept with Mau." Then they tied her up to a pillar and they ordered her to be beaten thirty times by the whip. That is the kind of punishment used in the past. The whipping was very, very strong and the blood began to penetrate, to come out into the cloth of the young monk. But "he" did not give in. "He" said, "No, I am innocent, please reconsider." And after Mau saw that, she said, "Please, thirty lashes are enough." She felt pity for the young novice. Because she was the daughter of a wealthy family, her request had some weight. So they allowed the novice to go home. When they went back to the temple, other people wanted to take care of the young novice but the young novice said, "No I will take care of myself. I can make the bandage, I will take care of the wound on my body," because she did not want others to discover the fact that she was not a young man.

After taking care of the wounds inflicted on her by the whips, she presented herself to her teacher, and her teacher said, "My son, I don't know, I'm not sure. I don't know whether you have done it or not. I really don't know. If you have done it, then I wish you would practice deeply the practice of Beginning Anew every day. And if you have not done it, please also

practice forbearance—*shanti-paramita*—and try to find the joy in the practice." That was all of his teaching. And because of that, she was requested by other people in the temple to move into the gate of the temple and stay there, and not to stay together with other monks. You know, every temple has a triple gate, and the tower bell was very close to the triple gate, and now Kinh Tam was ordered to go and live alone in the triple gate so that the population of the village could not blame the sangha, because there was already suspicion.

I don't know whether if I was the teacher of Kinh Tam I would allow her to continue to stay with me in the compound of the sangha. I don't know, because my time is different and that was a very old time and people were still full of prejudices, and so on. And I would have had enough wisdom to know whether my student had done it or not because I always try to practice good communication with my students and with my insight, with my mindfulness, I would know that he has done it or not. Because I am not there to blame my student, I am there only to help him or her. So she would tell me the truth. When the baby was born, Mau did not know what to do. She did not want at all to tell people that this was a child coming from a servant. That would be very bad for the reputation of her noble family. To die was preferable to saying that she has slept with a servant. That was something she could not bear, and her family could not bear. You have made a mistake, you have done something wrong, but you have no courage to admit your wrongness and you blame other people—that is something that happens every day. So finally she brought the baby to the novice. She brought the baby to the triple gate of the temple and said, "Novice, this is your child. Why don't you receive it?" Then she put it on the steps and she went away. When the baby started to cry, the novice said, "Well, now the child is abandoned. If I don't take him, who will take him? I am practicing compassion and understanding. If I don't take him and try to protect him, who will?" So he said, "Leave it to me!" And he picked up the baby.

[Bell]

The baby was hungry and the novice did not have milk. So she took the baby and went into the hamlet and tried to beg for some milk. Every day she had to go to the village and ask for some milk for her baby. There were people who were moved by the act of the young novice, but there were many people who said, "Well, how could he practice as a monk if he does things like this—sleeping with a woman and when the woman gave him the baby, accepting it, and now trying to raise the baby as a father. How can someone practice the Dharma in that way?" The novice felt that people didn't understand her, and yet she continued to practice forbearance because she was able to feel the peace and the joy of living with the Dharma.

If she wanted to get rid of that injustice, it would not be very difficult—just declare to the village council and to her teacher that she is a girl. And a few minutes later she would be free from that kind of blaming, from that kind of suffering. Why hadn't she done it? Because she loved the Dharma so much, she wanted so much to continue as a monk, that is why she did not give up. When you are in love with something very deeply, when you feel so much happiness with that object of your love, then you have the courage to bear all kinds of injustice. So being beaten, being misunderstood, being blamed by many people, she could still go on because she had the pleasure, the happiness, of being a monk, of practicing the Dharma. In our days, there are people who live in the Sangha and who encounter some difficulties and think of leaving the Sangha. They don't have that kind of forbearance. They cannot bear little injustices inflicted on them because their desire, their happiness is not large enough. Therefore the key is whether you love it a lot, you treasure it a lot, you want it a lot, whether your heart is huge or not. If your heart is small, then you cannot bear injustice inflicted on you. Understanding and love are what help your heart to grow bigger and bigger. That is the practice of the four unmeasurable hearts—loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. Because your heart can grow as big as the cosmos; the growth of your heart can never end. If you are like a big river, you can receive any amount of dirt—it will not affect you, and you are able to transform the dirt very easily.

In the Dharma talk in English preceding this one, I used that image offered by the Buddha. If you put an amount of dirt in a small container of water, then that water has to be thrown



away, people cannot drink it. But if you throw that amount of dirt into a huge river, people in the city continue to drink from the river, because the river is so immense. There does not have to suffering because of that amount of dirt. Overnight that dirt will be transformed by the water, by the mud within the heart of the river. So if your heart is big as the river, you can receive any amount of injustice and still live with happiness, and you can transform overnight the injustices inflicted on you. If you still suffer, it means that your heart is still not large enough. That is the teaching of forbearance in Buddhism. You don't try to bear, you don't to suppress your suffering. You only practice in order for your heart to expand as big as a river. Then you don't have to bear, you don't have to suffer.

There are ways to make your heart big. That is the practice of looking deeply in order for you to understand. The moment when you understand, your compassion arises. And that compassion will allow you to go on, allow you not to suffer, not to look at other people with the eyes of irritation and hatred. That is the real practice of forbearance—you don't have to suffer. Forbearance in the context of the Buddhist teaching is not to try to swallow the injustice, or to suppress the injustice, but to embrace it entirely with your big heart. So every morning you have to go to your heart, touch it, and ask, "My heart, my darling, have you grown overnight a little bit bigger?" We have to visit our heart every day in order to see whether our heart still continues to grow unlimited, to grow great. "Growing great" is the term used by Buddha while he was teaching about the four unmeasurable minds. Your heart of compassion becomes larger. It grows great all the time, your heart of loving kindness, your heart of joy, your heart of equanimity. OThat is why *paramita* is sometimes translated by the term "[ph: vo que]." [Thây writes on blackboard] It means "the highest point, the limit." [ph: vo que] means "no point all highest or limit." "[ph: Que]" means extreme, like a [ph: Ba kuk], the northernmost or the southernmost tip of the earth called [ph: Ba kuk]—north pole. It is an extreme, this is the limit. But how ur compassion, our loving kindness, our joy, our equanimity knows no limit—that is why these four minds are called "unmeasurable minds" because they always grow and grow, without stopping. They grow into a river, and then they grow into an ocean, and they continue. The more your heart becomes bigger and bigger, the easier you can bear, or accept, injustice without suffering.

A few days after the young monk received the baby and adopted him and tried to nourish him, he was summoned by his teacher: "My child, why have you done that? You have not slept with the lady, it is not your baby, but why have you received it? It does not seem that this is making a good reputation for our Sangha." I do not know whether, if I were the teacher I would do like him, very afraid of my prestige. But Kinh Tam bowed to him and said, "My dear teacher, I have learned in a sutra that if you build a stupa of seven stories, and if you build one thousand of them, the merit would not be as important as the merit of saving the life of a living being. That is why I have accepted this baby and try to bring it up." That is what the young monk told his teacher.

The novice learned to sing lullabies. So in the village they heard sometimes the big bell and the gatha, "Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true self. May the sound of this bell penetrate deep into the cosmos . . . ," and so on. And sometimes they could hear, "Sleep well, sleep well, my baby . . . ." These two things mingled with each other. I believe that the novice practiced well, singing the lullaby as well as the gatha, because both of them have the flavor of the Dharma in them.

When the little boy was grown up, Kinh Tam became very sick, and she knew that she would die in a few days. So she wrote a letter to her parents and she wrote down their exact address, and she told the boy that after her passing away, he had to try his best to go back to her original village and present this letter to her mother and father. She also wrote a letter to her teacher. Two letters. After she passed away, the boy did as he had been told. He went to the teacher and submitted the letter of his "father" and also he asked for the permission to depart in order to go to the original village of his "father." After reading the letter, the monk was very surprised so he asked two nuns to come to examine and all the nuns reported that the young novice was not a boy, but a girl. Then everyone was very surprised, and the monk sent

a messenger to the head of the village. The head of the village was very surprised, also. So he convened a meeting and sent a delegation to the temple for the verification of the fact. After having verified that, he announced to the whole village the truth and asked the family of Mau, Color, to come and answer their questions.

And Mau's wealthy family had to pay a very heavy kind of tax to the village, and they had to pay all the expenses of the funeral organized by the temple. In the Vietnamese poem written about the story we have the full text of the letter. Kinh Tam requested the forgiveness of her father and mother, saying that she had not told them where she had been because she desired so much to practice as a monk. She said that she practiced like that not only for herself, but for the whole family and for many living beings, and she hoped that they would understand and forgive her, and receive this young man as someone very close to the family although he is only an adopted child. Her parents cried a lot. It had been so many years without hearing anything from their daughter and suddenly this morning they received a letter announcing that she was no longer alive. So they cried a lot, and they set out for the Phap Van temple. They also told the former husband, Mr. Sung Tin, to come along. They spent many days traveling; and when they arrived at the temple, they saw the banner bearing their daughter's name, and a very long procession. All the people in the village came to attend the funeral service. They were so moved, and many people were crying.

If you practice, you have to practice like that. That is the absolutely perfect way to practice. Even if injustices are inflicted on you, you continue to have a lot of energy, you continue the Way. You don't blame anyone for your suffering. Practicing like that is real practice. When her family arrived, they participated in the funeral service and were received as distinguished guests by the temple and the village. After that, the whole village organized a ceremony to transfer all the merits to Kinh Tam and to practice *giai oan*. *Giai oan* means "untie the injustice." And it was said at the end of the story that the Buddha appeared and announced that Kinh Tam had arrived in a state of enlightenment, and she was now acting as one manifested body of Avalokiteshvara. Her name is Quan Am Thi Kinh. She is a Vietnamese Avalokiteshvara and the story is known by everyone. In the temple, many people know the poem by heart and it is the perfect model for the practice of forbearance.

All of us feel at times that we are victims of injustice. We suffer so much injustice, even from the people we love. And we want to repair that injustice, we want to cry out. We want to practice untying the injustice that we have borne for so long in the past. That is why we are always ready to talk to other people about our suffering and the injustice we have suffered. Maybe deep in our heart, we want justice to be done by any kind of means. Maybe we want a military solution. Sometimes you want to use a gun. Sometimes you want to use a stick. Sometimes you want to use an army. As a nation, if you feel that you are a victim of injustice, you are tempted to use a military solution. But if you are not a nation, you are inclined to use other kinds of revenge—using sticks, hiring someone to beat the other person, using a gun, or you want to manipulate the situation, you want to use political means in order to repair your injustice.

But according to the teaching of the Buddha, you can only repair that injustice in you, you can only transcend it, by transforming it. The only way is to practice the four immeasurable minds—*maitri*, which is loving kindness; *karuna*, which is compassion; *mudita*, joy; and *upeksha*, equanimity. And in order to cultivate these four qualities, you have to use the practice of looking deeply, namely, calming and looking—*samatha* and *vipasyana*. You do your best to remain calm, to remain concentrated. You do your best to look deeply into the nature of your suffering, and suddenly understanding comes and your heart begins to expand. Suddenly you feel that you have the power to bear that injustice; you can survive with that, you can live with that, and you even can transform it.

The Buddha said that when you are struck by one arrow, you suffer. But if a second arrow comes exactly to the same spot, you suffer not twice, but maybe thirty times more. When you suffer something and you get angry, your suffering will be not only doubled, but thirty times more intense. You amplify your suffering by your ignorance, your anger, your frustration,

your hatred. Why do you have to suffer that much? In fact, why do you have to receive the second arrow? With one arrow, and with some understanding and practice, you would not suffer much and you would be able to remove the arrow very soon. But because of our ignorance, our lack of practice, we become angry, we let hatred and despair overcome us—that is why our suffering has become unbearable. This is the teaching of the Buddha in the Samyutta Nikaya (*Samyutta Nikaya*: 4, 210) about the first arrow and the second arrow. The second arrow is ignorance.

The other day we used the image of a little child tearing apart a butterfly. The little child does not know that doing that is inflicting a lot of injustice and suffering on the little insect. The little child just wants to play. He doesn't know that tearing apart a butterfly like this is making a living being suffer. The little child is doing it out of ignorance. When we tell the little child, "My darling, do you know that tonight the little butterfly cannot go home to his parents? What if you cannot go back tonight to your parents? They would suffer a lot." If you tell a child that, the next time she will not tear a butterfly with her two hands. She will be able to protect life. "Lord, forgive them because they do not know what they are doing." People make each other suffer, and they don't know it. They act out of anger or hatred; they don't have happiness within themselves. They are overwhelmed with ignorance, with hatred, with anger, and that is why they have made people around them suffer. And we may be doing the same thing, but we don't know it.

[Bell].

It happens from time to time everywhere that a person will use a gun to kill people in a market place; suddenly in a high school someone with a gun just appears like that and kills three, four, five students without any reason at all. Your daughter, your son, goes to school as usual. And that morning it happens that it is your daughter who was killed by that crazy man. That is a form of injustice. And you might bear a lot of hatred toward that man. But if you look into that man and look deeply, you see that that man is full of craziness, that man is full of ignorance, that man is full of hatred, of alienation. When a man holds a gun and shoots at people like that without reason, there must be a reason. And people like him or like her, they do exist in the world. How could a man become like he is? How was his family, how was his society, how was his education? Did anyone take care of him at all? Of course, if we were there we would try our best to prevent him from continuing to kill other people. We are urged to act right away, put him in a situation where he cannot continue to harm people, even to lock him into a prison cell; we have to do that. But we have to do that with wisdom and compassion. We don't do that with anger and hatred. We don't do it out of the will to punish the man, because the man has been suffering a lot.

## The Art of Healing Ourselves

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 30, 1996 in Plum Village, France.

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Good Morning Dear Friends,

Today is the thirtieth of July, 1996 and we are in the Upper Hamlet. Today is also the full moon day. Tonight I hope that the full moon will be there for all of us. If the sky is clear, I will be happy to invite you to sit with me on the platform of my hut under the moon.

We have been talking to the children about the twenty-first century. We want to prepare ourselves to be ready for the twenty-first century. We have been talking about how to make our home comfortable for the twenty-first century. We talked about a room in which we can practice peace, reconciliation with ourselves, where we can restore ourselves, where we can take refuge. We talked about a local park taken care of by twenty or thirty houses. We discussed how to make that park into a center of peace and joy for children and for adults.

I would like to continue, because it is our duty to practice looking deeply in order to make life more pleasant for ourselves and for those we love. I want to talk about a day of mindfulness—a day for each family and from time to time, for many families at the same time.

In Plum Village we have been doing things that are very exciting. We are preparing the chanting book for the twenty-first century. We have nearly finished it. We will have it printed just two years before the twenty-first century. We have also prepared a book of practice for the young novice of the twenty-first century. We have been preparing a lot and we do it with a lot of joy. So this matter of taking care of the twenty-first century, it has to be the job of everyone because we only have four years before the new century starts. And we have decided to climb the hill of the twenty-first century together in peace, with a lot of happiness.

[Bell]

One of the things we have talked about concerning the preparation for the new century is how to handle our garbage. Because during this twentieth century we have produced a lot of garbage, a lot of suffering. We have created a lot of war, created a lot of suffering, a lot of discrimination, a lot of death. If we don't know how to take care of that garbage, the twenty-first century will not be pleasant. And we have only four years left to take care of our garbage. How to pile it up, how to transform it into compost, so that the flowers of the twenty-first century would have a chance to bloom? This is a big job and we have to do it together. We have to come together and practice looking deeply concerning how to handle the garbage we have produced. One person cannot do much.

[Bell]

Personally, I want the twenty-first century to be called the century of love. Because we desperately need love. The kind of love that will not produce suffering. There is a Buddha that is supposed to be born to us. His name is Maitreya. Maitri means love. So, Maitreya means Mr. Love. In order to prepare for that Buddha to come, we need time. We need to coordinate our efforts. Several times I have said that the new Buddha may not be in the form of one person. The new Buddha may take the form of a Sangha. The Sangha means community, community of practice. Naturally I myself and all my friends are working hard in order for the Buddha to come in the form of the community, Buddha as a Sangha.

The first element of love is *maitri*, the willingness to bring happiness to the person we love, the people we love, and therefore to ourselves. Because we know that if the other person is happy then we will be happy also. The Buddha said when you wake up in the morning you ask yourself this question, "What can I do today to make my Sangha happy?" This is a good practice. What can I do today to make him happy? What can I do today to make her happy? What can I do today to make them happy? To make my Sangha happy? That is the first question we have to ask in the morning.

I would like to say something about this question. Because I think that to do something may bring happiness, but just to not do something is equally important. If you are able to refrain

from doing something you can make many people happy. So the question might be put like this, “What can I refrain from doing today in order to make my Sangha happy?” Because in our daily life we might do things that make our beloved one suffer. Therefore just not to do it is good enough to make them happy. What can I do today to make the Sangha happy? What can I refrain from doing today in order to make my Sangha happy? This is a very good question. You have the willingness to love and to make people happy. You know that you'll be happy if the other people are happy. No one questions your good will—you really want to love, you want to make people happy. So, you want to make it not only a wish but a reality. So you try to do something, or you try to not do something, in order for happiness to be possible.

The day of mindfulness we organize each week in our family may be a very good opportunity for us to learn to do this. A day of mindfulness is like a breathing room in our home. It's something that a civilized family should practice. In the old time, people didn't work on Sunday—I hope they still practice that. Sunday is not the day for you to work. In Plum Village we call Saturday “lazy day.” To be lazy, that's not easy. You have to learn how to do it. On lazy days I used to ask people this question: “Dear friend, are you lazy enough?” To practice a lazy day is not easy, therefore we have to support each other in making it a real lazy day. Because we have the tendency to work hard, to be busy. A day of mindfulness, or maybe half a day of mindfulness, is what we have to do to increase the happiness in our family, in our society.

The question is how to organize that half-day or day of mindfulness so that everyone can enjoy it. It should not be hard practice. Because I don't really like the word “hard” practice or “intensive” practice—I don't know what it means, “intensive practice of meditation.” When I drink a glass of water in mindfulness, I practice mindfulness of drinking, and I get a lot of joy and peace during the time of drinking a glass of water. But can I drink my glass of water intensively? No. It does not mean anything to me. To drink water you just drink it with mindfulness. The more you are mindful, the more the drinking becomes a pleasure. The problem is whether you drink it in mindfulness or not. The problem is not whether you drink it intensively or not intensively. The same thing is true with walking meditation. If you walk with mindfulness, your steps will bring you a lot of joy and peace. If you don't, then there's no joy and peace. It is not a matter of being intensive or not intensive.

So we need the intelligence of everyone in the family to make the day of mindfulness a very pleasant day. And a day of mindfulness, according to me, is a day when we practice what we can do for the happiness of our beloved ones. It is very crucial that everyone in the family, everyone in the community, practices together; otherwise it would be very difficult. Imagine a family of five people. Only one person wants to practice mindfulness. It is possible, but it is extremely difficult. So, if you are in a family where everyone agrees on the practice of a day of mindfulness, you are a very lucky person. And you have to use all your intelligence. You have to tell your father, your mother, your brothers and your sisters, how you would like to organize a day of mindfulness. I repeat, a day of mindfulness a week is something very civilized. Because we know that without peace, without calm, happiness would not be possible.

A day of mindfulness is a time when we practice and enjoy peace. Enjoy calm. Enjoy communication. It is not because you can talk a lot that you can communicate. It is because you are peaceful, calm—you have the capacity to listen deeply to the other person—that you can communicate. Therefore, in the day of mindfulness you don't talk much. You practice listening deeply with your calm, with your peace and everyone is like that. That does not mean that joy will be diminished. In a day of mindfulness, even when people don't talk a lot to each other, they communicate more with each other by many ways. It can be a very joyful and happy day. I think you will all agree with me that the lazy day each week here is a very nice day. Although we practice silence, this silence is very helpful. It helps communication. It is not oppressive.

What can I do to make the people I love happy? That is our practice in the day of mindfulness. To me, to make another person happy you have to practice being there. To practice being there that is the essence of Buddhist meditation. But perhaps during the week you are not there with the people you love. You are always absent, even if you are eating with them or watching television with them. You are not really there for them. You have not made your presence true and available to the people you love. To me to love means to be there for the person you love. It is very simple, but it is a very deep practice. In Buddhist meditation we learn how to breathe, how to walk, how to smile so that we be there entirely with our true presence, because that is the most precious thing that we can give to the people we love. When you go to your mother and you sit quietly close to her, and you look at her and you say, “Mommy, I am really here for you,” you are practicing meditation, because you are truly there with the person you love.

[Bell]

The day of mindfulness therefore must be a day where members of the same family have to be really there for each other. That is the principle. How to do it? I rely on you to tell me. So we need to sit together and discover. The television companies who publicize their products say, “We bring people together.” They mean that things like video tapes and television programs bring people together. I don't believe this much because, as I see it, people who spend the day apart from each other and come home very tired don't have time to be with each other. They turn on the television set and just get lost in that. So television does not bring people together.

What then can bring people together? I think a day of mindfulness. They practice being there for each other. This is very important. This is a kind of answer to the suffering of our time—to practice being there for ourselves and for the people we love; it is very important. In a meditation center like Plum Village we should learn methods of producing our true presence for ourselves and for the people we love. Practice mindful breathing. Practice quiet sitting, smiling. Practice walking meditation. Practice drinking a glass of water in mindfulness. Practice eating your lunch in mindfulness. All these are to produce your true presence. It is very important. Because that is the essence of love, to be there, available, for the people you love.

What can I do to make them happy? We're talking about what we can do. But we don't talk about how we can be. To do maybe is less important than to be. To be there, fresh and calm and loving. I think that is the foundation of love. What you can do is just of secondary importance. Therefore, to be there—calm, loving, fresh, is a very important practice. If meditation cannot help you to be there, to be calm, to be fresh for your beloved one, don't practice meditation. It does not help. So practice meditation in such a way that you can be there really, with some calm, some peace, some freshness, and you know that your meditation practice is good meditation, good practice. That is the whole process of learning. If you have succeeded to some extent, you tell your brother and sister how you have done meditation—that you become more quiet, more released from your suffering, more present for your beloved one. I think that my discussion has to be focused on these practical methods.

I trust that you know how to share breakfast together in mindfulness, in joy. I know that there are people in the morning before starting off to work who eat their breakfast like everyone else. But, they don't practice being there for the people who will be also away for the day. And whom they cannot see for many hours, maybe eight or ten hours. Instead of drinking their tea or their coffee mindfully and smiling to that person sitting across the table, they hold a newspaper like this and hide themselves behind the piece of paper. It is not very wise. It's not very nice. So in a day of mindfulness we won't do things like that. We won't turn our television set on. We turn everything off, except one thing, our presence.

We turn our presence on, and beginning in the morning, when we wake up, we think: “What can I do to make them happy? What should I refrain from doing in order to make them happy?” Please answer these questions in detail, then you will know how to organize a beautiful day of mindfulness. Having breakfast together, that is an art. How to prepare your

breakfast and how to sit down and enjoy breakfast together, I need many sessions of Dharma discussions in order to find it out. We would profit a lot from your collective deep looking, your knowledge, your experience about how to organize a breakfast where joy and peace and love can be possible. Give us a Dharma talk, give us a report, give us a Dharma discussion that helps us to learn how to do it. There are those of us who prepare our breakfast while following our in-breath and our out-breath, smiling to the bread, the milk, the muesli, and so on, and who are full of love in the heart. “I am making this breakfast for my Sangha. I am nourishing my Sangha because my Sangha is my body, the Sangha body.” Even if the other brothers and sisters don’t contribute to making the breakfast, I would not be angry because I am preparing breakfast with love. So there’s no jealousy, there’s no rancor in my heart. During the time I prepare my breakfast, I am nourished with love. My Sangha is me, my Sangha is my body, therefore I prepare my breakfast with joy.

You may like to make a little bit of preparation beforehand. Tomorrow will be the day of mindfulness. Today you might already enjoy making a few preparations so that tomorrow would be wonderful. Maybe a few flowers for tomorrow, maybe a special tablecloth, maybe a loaf of special bread for tomorrow. You are motivated by the idea, by the desire, to be happy and to make your beloved one happy. Eating breakfast in such a way that happiness and love can be present. Then you may enjoy walking meditation in a park or just in the front yard. Everyone in the family should know how to walk in order to generate peace and joy and togetherness by walking. You don’t have to walk very long, you just walk the time you want to walk. And each step like that can bring you a lot of joy and peace and happiness.

If you want to invite a child from another family or a friend to join your day of mindfulness, please do it. Because you are motivated by the desire to make him or her happy with your mindfulness day. Many, many years ago—I think about twenty-five or thirty years ago—I wrote a little book where I proposed a day of mindfulness every week. A day when we have really the opportunity to practice attention, mindfulness, love, and care to ourselves and to the people we love. I think in the twenty-first century, to hold a day of mindfulness a week is a very civilized thing to do. Not only for the Buddhists, but for everyone. They may not call it a “day of mindfulness,” but it must be of the same essence: cultivating peace, cultivating togetherness, cultivating the present moment. It is very important for our happiness.

Before the children go out and play, I would like to remind of them of the practice of visiting the Buddha that I have proposed to children in Holland—they love it. And if the adults want to practice, it’s okay also. Visiting the Buddha. The Buddha is within yourself, the real Buddha. The Buddha you see in the garden is a Buddha, but made with plaster, it’s not a real Buddha. When you bow to that Buddha, if you bow correctly, you touch the Buddha within. A real Buddha is not made of copper or gold or plaster—a real Buddha is made with mindfulness. Mindfulness carries understanding, peace, and love. So bow to the Buddha in such a way that you touch Buddha inside and you know Buddha is not something abstract, it is your mindfulness.

You have proved to be mindful at times. You are very capable of drinking a glass of milk mindfully. One day I was drinking my milk, very slowly and mindfully. I saw the cow as my adopted mother. I feel very happy to have the chance not to eat my mother. I am vegetarian, and I feel very lucky not to be forced to eat the flesh of my adopted mother. Every time I drive from the Upper Hamlet to the Lower Hamlet, looking at the straw, I see milk in it inside, because a mother cow will eat it and it will become milk. So when I look at the milk I see the straw and when I look at the straw I see milk, I see the water, I see the sky, I see the sunshine, and I practice like that all day. I can see the nature of interbeing in everything, everyone.

This is very wonderful because it reveals to me a wonderful world of interconnection. Trying to look at things like that will reduce all my fear, and discrimination and anger. It is very important, because in Buddhism we speak about liberation from suffering by understanding. The children prove to be able to be compassionate, to be loving, to be calm at times—therefore the Buddha is real inside. There is no doubt. When I make a lotus flower and bow to

a child, I say, “A lotus for you, my dear, you who are a Buddha to be.” If you want to be a Buddha, you can be a Buddha. A Buddha is someone who is made of mindfulness. You know how to drink a glass of milk mindfully. You know how to walk mindfully or to breathe mindfully. During the time you do so, you touch Buddhahood in you, the Buddha nature in you.

So it’s very nice to visit the Buddha within from time to time. You might like to sit down quietly and breathe in and out for a few minutes to calm yourself, and then you ask, “Little Buddha, my little Buddha, are you there?” Ask very deeply, ask the question very deeply and quietly, “My little Buddha, are you there?” In the beginning you might not hear the answer. There is an answer always, but because you are not calm enough, you don’t hear the answer. “Anyone there? Little Buddha, are you there?” Then the second time you begin to hear the voice of your little Buddha answering you, “Yes, my dear, of course I am always there for you.” When you hear that you smile, “I know. Little Buddha, you are my calm. I know you are always there and I need you, to be calm, from time to time. From time to time I am not calm enough. I scream, I act as if I do not have the Buddha in me. But because I know you are there, I know that I have the capacity of being calm. Thank you little Buddha, you are my calm. I need you to be there.” And the little Buddha says, “Of course I’ll be there for you all the time. Just come and visit anytime you need.” That is the practice of touching the Buddha inside. It’s a very important practice. Not only for children, for all of us.

I love to sit close to children because of their freshness. Every time I hold the hand of a child and practice walking meditation, I always profit from the freshness of him or her. I might offer him or her my stability, but I always profit from their freshness. Holding the hand of a child in mindfulness, offering him some stability, offering her some stability, and receiving a lot of freshness—this is what I love to do. You say, “Dear little Buddha, you are my freshness. Thank you for being there.” You have confidence because you have been able to be fresh, many times. If you touch the Buddha, the freshness in you continues to grow. The adults, they also practiced like that. “Dear little Buddha, you are my tenderness.” Tenderness is what all of us need and children prove to be tender, many times.

“Dear little Buddha, you are my mindfulness,” that is true. Because a Buddha is someone that is made of an energy called mindfulness. To be mindful means to be aware of what is going on, and this is only possible when you are really there. If you are really there one hundred percent, you will be aware of what is going on. This is a very crucial practice.

“Dear Buddha, you are my understanding.” True, Buddha is the power of understanding. Because if you are there, you are very alert. You know everything that is going on, that is why you understand things and people very easily. So, “Little Buddha, you are my understanding. I need you very much because I know that understanding is the base of love.” If you don’t understand someone, you cannot love him or her. That is why understanding is so crucial.

“Dear little Buddha, you are my love. You are the capacity of loving.” Children, of course, have the capacity to love. If they touch that capacity every day, their love will grow, their capacity of loving will grow, and they are on the way of realizing fully the Buddha within.

So you practice sitting there and you touch these qualities of the Buddha in you. You touch the real Buddha, not the Buddha made of plaster or copper or even emerald. For the practitioner, Buddha is not a god. Buddha is not someone outside in the sky, on a mountain. Buddha is alive, that is a living Buddha that is in us. Tell me of a person who does not possess the nature of Buddha within him or her. No. In Mahayana Buddhism, the most important message of all the sutras is that everyone has the capacity of being a Buddha. The capacity of loving, understanding, and being enlightened. That is the most important message of all sutras.

So this is a very deep practice. You may spend only three or four minutes on this practice. You may like to put your fingers on your heart and you practice visiting the Buddha inside. The Buddha is in your heart, also everywhere in your body, not only in your heart. In your stomach, also. Sometimes you feel that fear is in your stomach, but you should know that the Buddha is in your stomach at the same time. It is up to you to choose.



After a few minutes of practice like that, you practice alone, or together with a few friends. You say, “Dear Buddha, it is very comfortable to know that you are there.” The Buddha always says, “Of course I am always there for you. But please visit more often.” Because every time you visit the Buddha, the Buddha in you profits. The Buddha in you will have more space and air to breathe. Because during the day you may have suffered a lot and you throw into yourself anger, hatred, frustration, suffering. So you deprive the Buddha of fresh air to breathe inside. So your little Buddha may be suffocating a little bit inside. But every time you practice touching the Buddha, you bring in a lot of space, of air. The Buddha within you has a chance to grow. It is very important. Sitting meditation, that is for what? Walking meditation, that is for what? That is to give to the Buddha inside a chance to grow.

“Dear little Buddha, I need you very much,” and the little Buddha in you will say, “Dear one, I also need you very much. Please come and visit more often.” This practice is called recollection of the Buddha and is taught in every school of Buddhism. You touch the Buddha, you touch all the qualities of the Buddha, and you know that the Buddha is absolutely real—not as an idea, not as a notion, but as a reality. Our task, our life, our practice, is to nourish the Buddha and give ourselves and the people we love a chance.

Please write down the practice in short, complete sentences to make it available for other children who are not sitting today in this Dharma hall, so that they can practice with you also.

The children should stand up and bow

[Bell—Children leave Dharma hall].

On the sixteenth of this month I started our summer opening with a Dharma talk where I said that it’s very important to allow our body and our minds to rest. Our body may still carry a lot of wounds inside, and our consciousness also, it may carry a lot of wounds inside. They need healing. The basic condition for all healing is to be able to rest, but we don’t have the capacity to rest. We have the habit of running, of doing things. That is why to meditate is first of all to learn how to rest, to give your body and your mind a chance to rest and to heal themselves. It seems to be a very simple thing, but we need training to be able to do that.

I said that when an animal living in the forest is wounded, it always tries to look for a quiet place to lay down for many days and allow the wound to heal. During these days the animal does not think about eating or anything else. That is the practice of all animals in the forest every time they get wounded by another animal or by other kinds of things, including disease. That wisdom we have to learn. There are wounds within our body. We may have diseases, we may even have cancer or other difficulties that we think to be incurable. We may have blocks of suffering in our consciousness. We may have despair, fear, and confusion, but we know that our body has the capacity of healing itself if we allow it a chance to rest. This is not only true for our body but also for our soul.

Our consciousness knows and has the capacity of healing itself—only if we allow it the chance, that is, to allow it to rest, to authorize it to rest. When we cut our finger we are not so afraid, we know that our body can heal itself. So we just clean the wound, protect it from the dirt, and the battle is from inside and in just twenty-four hours we can heal it. Our body knows how to create antibodies to protect itself. We have to believe in our body. We have to allow our body a chance to rest. Many difficult diseases may be healed just by our capacity of resting. This we have to learn. In the practice of Buddhism there are many things like that to learn. The sutra on mindful breathing, for instance, is more than enough for you to heal yourself. If you know how to practice exercises brought to you by the Buddha, you know how to do it, to enjoy doing that, you give your body a chance to heal and also your consciousness. You have had the experience of utmost suffering—something happened to you and you did not believe that you could survive that. How could you survive such bad news, pain? And yet, you have survived. You have gone through that period and you’ve proved to be able to survive that kind of suffering. It means your consciousness knows the way to survive. You say, “Time heals.” But time alone cannot heal your suffering. It is not because you are acquainted with the suffering that you are healed. No. It is because of the fact that your consciousness knows the way to heal itself. You have to trust it because in your consciousness

there is the Buddha, there is a seat of love, of understanding. If you allow them to manifest, then your consciousness will be able to heal itself.

Talking to a therapist, talking to a teacher, talking to Dharma brothers and sisters, allows these wholesome energies to be touched, to give them a chance to become more apparent. They will take care of the healing. Sometimes we speak about a “talking cure,” but the talking cannot cure. The talking—the most it can do—is to allow yourself to have confidence in your own ability to heal yourself. So it’s very important that during that time we spend with a Sangha, a Dharma teacher, we have to learn the techniques of allowing our body and our soul to rest. The heart of the Buddhist practice is to stop—to stop running, to stop preventing our body and our soul from resting.

Many people believe that they need to go for holidays. They struggle, they do everything in order to have these holidays. But during these holidays do they really rest? They are much more tired after the holidays. So everyone has to learn the art of resting, of restoring. Your Dharma teachers, your Dharma brothers and sisters, they know how to practice resting and healing. When you practice fasting for instance, you allow your stomach, intestines, liver, kidneys, to rest. You are not afraid of fasting, because you know that there is a reservoir, a reserve, of nutrition in your body. You can go on a fast of two or three weeks without eating and not lose your strength. Those of us who have tried the practice of cleaning our digestive system, we know that. We just drink water. We just rest.

We continue to enjoy our sitting meditation, walking meditation. We don’t feel that we lose any energy at all. Our bowels, given time to rest for ten days or two weeks, can heal themselves. We have to believe in such things because we have practiced it and other people have practiced it—it proved to be the truth. Healing is possible only on the days of resting.

Now how about our consciousness, our mind? What kind of practice should you do, or what kind of non-practice should you do in order for your soul and your consciousness to be able to rest? We should not lose our time in getting ideas, even very wonderful ideas, about enlightenment, nirvana, Buddhahood, or things like that. We should get to the real thing, to the bones of the practice. How to start? With *samatha*. Samatha is just stopping. You stand in front of a young tree. You look at the young tree. You stand in front of the tree in such a way that you can stop. You breathe in and out in such a way that you can stop completely running in your mind and in your body.

Last year when we visited China, we saw on crossroads the sign, “stop.” And the Chinese word, “stop,” is exactly the word that the Chinese people use to translate the word “samatha.” One day I stood in front of a sign like this and I practiced breathing and smiling to it. And I completely stopped. It was like standing in front of the Buddha who made the sign to tell you to stop. You are breathing, you are standing there, but you have stopped completely. It is a wonderful thing to be stopped. With stopping like that, calm becomes something possible. Peace becomes something possible and of course healing. As long as you continue to run—running to look for something or running to escape something—it is still running. You have not stopped, you have no peace. So learning how to stop is extremely important. Because stopping, being calm, being peaceful, is the precondition for deep looking, which is *vipasyana*. Vipasyana is insight practice, contemplation, looking deeply. Meditation is made of stopping, calming and looking deeply. Stopping helps you to rest, to calm, to have peace, to provide the basic condition for healing. Then looking is something you can do easily once you have stopped. Looking into the nature of your illness, looking into the nature of your pain, you begin to have the insight, you begin to understand. That understanding relieves you from the pain completely. That is called salvation by knowledge. We don’t speak about salvation by grace in Buddhism. We speak about salvation by knowledge, by understanding, *prajña*. *Prajñaparamita* means the kind of understanding that carries you to the other shore, the other shore of no-suffering.

[Bell]

One of the deepest insights that you may try to obtain is the insight on no-self. But no-self is not a theory, a doctrine, a philosophy. No-self is only the insight that has to be touched

directly with your practice. As practitioners we should not talk about no-self in such a way that it will have nothing to do with our daily life. I have recommended that all friends who come here to Plum Village during this summer learn and practice the practice of Earth-touching. Touching the Earth is one of the many practices we do in Plum Village in order to touch the nature of our non-self. It is very healing. It heals body and mind. We should practice it every day.

You hold your hands like this [palms together in front of chest] and stand in front of something like a tree, or the blue sky, or a dandelion, or the statue of the Buddha, anything—because everything has the Buddha inside, has the ultimate dimension inside—to bow to anything is fine, to the moon, to the morning star. You produce your true presence, and be there with one hundred percent of yourself. Then you bow down and you touch the earth. Touch the earth with your feet, with your arms, with your forehead. Touch deeply, don't do it halfway. Because this is an act of surrender. Surrender what and surrender to what? This is the act of surrendering the self, the idea of self. Because you think that you are a separate entity, that is the basic cause for your suffering. When you touch the earth deeply—the earth may be your mother, your father, your ground of being, yourself—you surrender the idea that you are a separate thing. You smile and you open your palms. The act of opening your palm like this and facing inward, it means that I'm nothing. There is nothing. My intelligence—we're very proud of our intelligence. Our talents. Our diplomas. Our position in society. We may be proud of many things we have or we are, but when we are in that position we smile and we know, we know that all these things have been handed down by our ancestors.

If you have a beautiful voice, don't think that you have created that beautiful voice for yourself. It has been transmitted by your ancestors, your parents. If you have the talent of a painter, don't think that you have invented that talent. It has been transmitted to you as a seed. So everything you have thought that you are has come from the cosmos, from your ancestors. So during the first touching of the earth you link yourself with the cosmos. The water in you, the heat in you, the air in you, the soil in you, belong to the water outside, the soil outside. Without the forest how could you be? Without your father and mother how could you be there this moment? Therefore you say, in wisdom, that you are nothing. Everything that you think, you thought that you are, you have received from the cosmos, from parents—including your body. Suddenly non-self arises as an insight. You belong to the stream of life. If you bear hatred toward your father, you think that your life has been ruined by your father, that you don't want to have anything to do with your father. It is out of ignorance that you have thought so. Because if you touch the reality of no-self, you see very clearly that you are your father. You are just a continuation of your father, and your father is a continuation of your grandfather.

We are one in a stream of life. To think that you are a separate entity, that you are a self that can be independent from your father, is a very funny thing. Because your father is inside you, you can never get rid of him. There is no alternative except to reconcile with your father. To reconcile with him means to reconcile with yourself. You have a chance to do so now with the practice. The other person, it might not be your father, he may be your brother or your spouse or anyone. You think that he or she has made you suffer so much, has made your life miserable. There is a tendency in you never to see him again, to hear from him again or from her again. That kind of willingness, that kind of feeling is born from your ignorance of the reality of no-self. Because we are all together. Not only are we together, we are inside each other, we inter-are. So during the first act of Touching the Earth you surrender your idea of self, and suddenly you release a lot of suffering, a lot of anger. You give yourself a chance for compassion and understanding to be born in your heart.

When you make a prostration like that you are not invoking a god to come and save you. To save yourself. But it is really a practice of wisdom. You touch the earth in order to release, to let go of your notion of self and to get insight that you belong to the same stream of life, reality. Suddenly you see that it is possible for you to make peace with that person. Making peace with him means making peace with you. Strange, because my peace depends very much

on his peace or her peace. If I devote time, energy, to help him, to help her to suffer less, suddenly I have more peace and more happiness. I do not have the intention to do it for me. But I get all the results.

When you see a small insect in danger, you spend half a minute to rescue the insect. You think that you are doing that for its sake, out of your compassion. But while you do that you cultivate the compassion inside you and happiness becomes yours. What does it mean to be compassionate? To me, to be compassionate means to be able to relate to other living beings. When you are able to relate to other living beings your loneliness, your feeling of being cut off, will disappear. So, compassion is for whom—for these living beings or for you? The answer is, for both. Any word, any thought, any act, born from that insight of no-self, brings healing and reconciliation within you and around you. There are friends who have practiced the Five Prostrations and the Three Prostrations who have reported that the practice is very effective, that those who practice just one hour get a big relief, and continue to cry and cry during the first hour of practice. You already know when you practice like that you do not invoke, call upon a god to help you, but you touch reality. You touch understanding. You touch prajña, that is able to free you. So stopping, resting, is for healing. Looking deeply, touching the insight of no-self is also for healing, for liberation. That is the essence of Buddhist meditation.

Are you interested in realizing your Buddha nature in you, in suffering, in enlightenment? But, that Buddha nature, that suffering, that enlightenment, do they have anything to do with your suffering, your illness? I would not be interested in Buddha nature, enlightenment, awakening, if these have nothing to do with my suffering, my liberation. I only do the practices that can help me to rest, to heal and to liberate myself.

Our practice should be concrete, effective. We should not allow a practice to go on for a long time without bringing us any relief, any transformation. That would not be an intelligent way of practicing. When a farmer, after having used a certain kind of seeds or fertilizer, or methods of agriculture, does not get the results he wants, he would be intelligent enough to change. Meditators have to be like that. If having tried a certain method for some time they do not feel any change, any transformation, they should inquire again. They should learn again from their teachers, their brothers in the Dharma, their sisters in the Dharma, in order to get the right methods. According to the Buddha, the Dharma is effective right away—if you get the right Dharma, like mindful breathing. The moment when you begin breathing in mindfully you already get the result of such a practice. You get the concentration. You get the stopping. What is the use of breathing in if you cannot stop and rest? If you don't feel more concentrated, why do you have to bother yourself? To suffer because of the practice of breathing in and out, is nonsense. So if you are breathing in and out, and feel concentrated and restful and calm and producing your true presence, you know that the practice is correct and you already enjoy the fruit of the practice.

Walking meditation: Why do we have to walk slowly like that? Why do you have to compose yourself in slowing down like that? It does not look natural. In the beginning, people around the practice center always say, “They don't seem to live in the real world. They like to live in a dream, they walk so slowly.” That is a first impression because in the world people always run. They don't know the art of stopping. They don't know the art of living deeply each moment of their life. So when they see a nun or a monk or a lay person walking, looking, smiling like that, they don't feel it's normal. They feel it's abnormal. There's one villager in the New Hamlet, she said she was very, very surprised and shocked when she saw a nun walking slowly who stopped and looked at the garbage. What is the use of looking at the garbage like that for a long time? What is normal and what is abnormal? There are people who have demonstrated that after just a few hours or a few days of staying in Plum Village they begin to like the practice. Because for the first time they know how to stop. To be able to stop is a wonderful thing, because they may have been running for the last 3,000 years.

[Bell]

Please, when you breathe in, do not make an effort of breathing in. You just allow yourself to breathe in. Even if you don't breathe in it will breathe in by itself. So don't say, "My breath, come, so that I tell you how to do." Don't try to force anything, don't try to intervene, just allow the breathing in to take place. What you have to do is be aware of the fact that the breathing in is taking place. And you have more chance to enjoy your in-breath. Don't struggle with your breath, that is what I recommend. Realize that your in breath is a wonder. When someone is dead, no matter what we do, the person will not breathe in again. So we are breathing in, that is a wonderful thing. Breathing in I know I'm alive, it's a miracle. We have to enjoy our in-breath. There are many ways to enjoy your in-breath. We want you to tell us how you enjoy your in-breath, whether in a sitting position or in a walking position. But if you don't enjoy breathing in, breathing out, you don't do it right.

This is the first recommendation on breathing that the Buddha made. When breathing in, I know this is the in-breath. When breathing out, I know this is the out-breath. When the in-breath is long, I know it is long. When it is short, I know it is short. Just recognition, mere recognition, simple recognition of the presence of the in-breath and out-breath. When you do that, suddenly you become entirely present. What a miracle, because to meditate means to be there. To be there with yourself, to be there with your in-breath. So you now understand the two sentences, "Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know I am breathing out." And a few minutes later, "Breathing in I know my in-breath has become deep. Breathing out, I know my out-breath has become slow." That is not an effort to make the in-breath deeper or the out-breath slower. That is only a recognition of the fact. These instructions will be used for our walking meditation right after the Dharma talk. After having followed your in-breath and out-breath for a few minutes you will notice that your in-breath and out-breath now have a much better quality, because the image of mindfulness, when touching anything, increases the quality of that thing. The Buddha when he touches something, reveals and increases the quality of being of that thing. Mindfulness is the Buddha, therefore it plays that role.

When you look at the full moon, and if you are mindful, "Breathing in I see the full moon, breathing out I smile at the full moon," suddenly the full moon reveals itself to you maybe one hundred times more clearly. It's more beautiful, it's clearer, it's more enjoyable. Why? Because the moon has been touched by mindfulness. So when you touch your in-breath and out-breath with your mindfulness, your in-breath becomes more harmonious, more gentle, deeper, slower, and so does your out-breath. Now you enjoy in-breathing and out-breathing. Naturally your breathing becomes more enjoyable, the quality of your breathing increases. So "In/Out" is for the beginning. [Thây writes on blackboard.] Then "Deep/Slow" is the next step: "Breathing in, I know that my in breath has become deep and I enjoy it. Breathing out, I see that my out-breath has become slow and I enjoy it."

During that time you have stopped, you have allowed your body and your mind to rest. Even if you are walking, you are resting. If you are sitting, you are resting. You are not struggling anymore, on your cushion, or walking. Then later on you will try this. These words are only to help you to recognize what is happening. "Calm/Ease: Breathing in I feel the calm in me." This is not autosuggestion, because if you have enjoyed In/Out and Deep/Slow, calm is something that is established. Resting. If you touched your calm, your calm rose. It's like when you touched the moon. "Breathing out, I feel ease in me." I don't suffer anymore. I will not make it hard anymore. Don't be too hard on yourself. Allow yourself to be at ease with yourself. Don't struggle. All of these can be done even if lots of suffering is still in your body and in your soul. Doing this, we are taking care of them. We are not trying to escape the pain in us. We are giving our body and our consciousness a rest.

"Smile/Release: Breathing in I smile." In Plum Village we speak about "mouth yoga," you just try to smile and then you realize the relaxation of the many hundreds of muscles on your face. According to the law of cause and effect when you have joy you smile. Or when you smile you release all the tension on your face. The first case is cause and effect. The second case is also cause and effect. So why do you have to wait for joy to take the initiative? Why

don't you allow your mouth to take the initiative? Do you practice some kind of discrimination against your body? You know that the moment when you sit down and rest you feel much better in your soul. So the body can always take the initiative if you allow it to be. And to practice meditation, you don't practice it only with your mind, but also with your body. The Buddha said it is possible to touch nirvana with your body.

“Breathing in, I smile,” because there is calm, ease, and the joy of being rested. And “breathing out, I release.” I release because there is in me a tendency to continue to run, to struggle. Even in my dream I continue to struggle—that is a habit energy of more than three, four thousand years. I recognize it. It has been transmitted to me by many generations of ancestors. So now I'm practicing for them. If I can stop and release, then all my ancestors in me get liberated. You are doing it for everyone, because you are not a self. And you are doing it out of love.

The last is, “Present moment/Wonderful moment.” To be walking on earth and realizing that you are alive, dwelling in the present moment. You see, to be alive and to be walking on earth is already a miracle. Because you have been running to look for your happiness, you may not know that happiness is available in the here, and the now. Conditions for your happiness may be more than enough in the here and the now. That is the result of the practice of stopping—stopping to realize that you are wonderful like this. You can be happy right now.

“Present moment,” because that is the only moment for us to live. If you miss the present moment, you miss your appointment with life. The Buddha said life is available only in the present moment. “Wonderful moment,” that is life that you touch. Suddenly happiness becomes possible. Being alive, walking with the Sangha, touching the blue sky, the earth, breathing in and out freely, allowing us to rest body and consciousness is already a wonderful thing. Do we need a deeper practice? A more difficult practice? More complicated kind of practice? I don't think so. Because for those of us who have practiced forty, fifty years already, we continue to practice like this or something similar to this, and we always get more peace and joy and happiness. Our insight always continues to grow. You don't have to look for an “intensive” course of meditation, or a “high” level of meditation, or “intensive” or “high” practice. Lin-Chi, the founder of the Rinzai school of meditation, said, “The miracle is not to walk on fire or on thin air, the miracle is to walk on earth.” If mindfulness is there, you are performing the miracle of being alive in each moment.

So please, my friends, now it is time for us to enjoy walking together. When you hear the bell, enjoy your in-breath and out-breath. We will take time to enjoy also going to the bathroom. After that we gather around the linden tree. We start walking together. Walking meditation, I consider it to be an act of life-celebrating. To walk together as a Sangha, enjoying every step we make, feeling alive, is really the celebration of life. Don't consider it to be hard or hard practice.

## The Five-Fold Steps of Training

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1996 in Plum Village, France.

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August 4, 1996

Good morning, my friends. Today is the fourth of August, 1996, we are in the Lower Hamlet, and we are going to speak English.

In the past three weeks we have been talking with each other about how to run the twenty-first century, how to climb together the hill of the twenty-first century, with joy and peace and happiness. We already talked about a room in our home so that we can practice restoring our self, restoring peace, joy and communication. We also talked about a little park in our neighborhood so that people in the neighborhood may enjoy walking meditation, sitting together in peace, and so on.

We also have talked about how to maintain peace in school. I think we have to ask schoolteachers how we could have more peace and joy and harmony in school. Not only do we have to ask them, but we have to sit down together, teachers and students, in order to decide how we can make the school a beautiful place in which to live. I know of a number of schools where teachers and students practice being quiet during the first three or five minutes and just enjoy breathing in and out; and every time there is disharmony, there is anger, in school, everyone in the school practices sitting down and breathes in and out peacefully.

I don't think that this is a Buddhist practice alone; it is a practice that everyone likes. I am sure that the Catholics like the practice, the Protestants, the Jews, the Muslims also, because everyone values peace and harmony, and everyone knows that to breathe in and out deeply is very good. Doctors, scientists, nurses: they know very well that breathing quietly, slowly and deeply is very good. When a nurse gives you a shot, she may ask you to breathe in and out peacefully, and while you are preoccupied with breathing in and out, she just gives the shot and you don't feel anything at all; you feel fine.

I know of a school teacher whose name is Henry. He teaches mathematics in a high school in Toronto. He is old—I think he has arrived at the age where he can retire; but the principal of the high school and all the other teachers asked him to stay on because people like his teaching so much. The first time he came to Plum Village for the practice of mindfulness, he confessed that the thing he liked best was to go fishing. When other people could not catch a fish, he did not know why, but he continued to catch fish after fish. That is why he liked it so much. But after staying in Plum Village, he decided that killing fish like that is not a nice thing. These beautiful little animals are swimming very happily in the stream, and suddenly you've caught them, and they die. So he decided to abandon fishing as a hobby, and he thought that, when he went home, he would find other kinds of joys. He found a lot of joys.

But he had some difficulties adjusting the way of life he learned at Plum Village to his environment. The day class resumed, he came in the classroom using walking meditation. He never did that before. He opened the door slowly, he entered slowly, he smiled to the students, and he walked slowly to his desk. And then when he stood up and wiped the blackboard, he did it mindfully, slowly, and all the students were very surprised. They thought that he was sick.

So they asked, "Papa, are you sick?" Because they love him; he's a very excellent mathematics teacher. He was very well known in Vietnam as a mathematics teacher. He wrote many good books on mathematics. He used to get angry with his students. Every time a child couldn't give an answer to his question or showed his stupidity, he would get angry. He might just pick up a piece of chalk and throw it directly to the head of the student. That's the way he had done in the past. And when he corrected math exercises, he might get angry; he might write down, "You are stupid." But still, the students liked him. There is something in him that makes the students like him, that is why they call him "Papa."

“Papa, are you sick?” He smiled and said, “No, I am not sick. I am practicing mindfulness.” “What is mindfulness?” He began to explain, “I am wiping out the things on the blackboard, and I do it slowly, I dwell in the present moment, and I enjoy doing that. I don’t hurry in order to finish it. I just enjoy every step I make. You see, this morning, I came in, I saw you, I’m very happy. So I just stop and look at you and smile, and that makes me very happy.” He spent a few minutes talking about what he had learned in Plum Village. Then he talked with them about the wonders of mindful breathing. He said, “I got a lot of calm when I was in Plum Village, and I want you to try it. Let us sit down; we don’t have any bell here, but I will ask a boy to do like this [clap, clap] and then all of us just sit quietly and enjoy breathing in, calming, and breathing out, smiling.”

There they went, the boy in the front did like this [clap, clap] and then he and all the rest of the students practiced breathing in and breathing out. He said, “That is excellent. Why don’t we do it for two minutes?” And they did it for two minutes. I think the students listen to him and like to try because they have sympathy with him. He proposed that every fifteen minutes there would be a pause of two minutes. Another boy would take a turn to [clap, clap] and then everyone would stop. He would stop lecturing, and everyone would practice breathing and smiling. They don’t have a bell, so they just stopped by the sound. After a few months of practice like that, both teachers and students realized that they had made a lot of progress in their studies. The class has grown much more peaceful. And they love it, they continue that practice of breathing, smiling, in the beginning of the class and in the middle of the class. So, they could have three times to breathe in and out and enjoy being together.

Professor Henry reported to me in a letter that other classes learned about that, and they adopted the same kind of breathing in, out, and get three breaks during the hour of mathematics. At one point the whole school knew about the practice, and all of them enjoyed it. And that is why, when our Professor Henry asked for retirement, they said, “No, you have to stay on, you have helped us so much.” Now Professor Henry no longer does things like throwing a piece of chalk directly at the head of his students. He told me that one time when he was correcting an exercise, he saw that the student did not understand anything at all. In the past he would write down, “You are stupid,” but this time he did not write down that kind of word. He wrote like this: “My dear, you don’t understand; that’s my fault.” A very deep transformation. And the student who received that correction got moved to tears. “It’s my fault because I did not try my best to help you understand, that is why you don’t understand me.” Henry has come back to Plum Village several times for the practice; he’s coming for this September retreat. He received the Five Wonderful Precepts many years ago, and finally he was asked to become a Dharma teacher. Those of you who will be back here for September, you will meet him.

So I would like to tell the young people who are here today, you can practice peace at school. The other day I asked you to ask your teacher when there is a conflict between you and someone else and you get irritated or angry, and you don’t know what to do to preserve peace and to reconcile. A teacher should know. If she does not know yet, it is her duty to go and learn from someone else. It’s very important; you just ask the question, and you make the wheel begin to turn. Yesterday, a mother told me that her daughter did not speak English, so her daughter had asked her to ask me what she can do every time she gets angry: I recommended that they ask their mother first. So if you ask your mother or your father that question, and the answer is not completely satisfying, then they will try harder and next time they will show you not only the theory, but also the practice.

In our hospitals, we’ve got to have a practice center. I have seen in many big cities, like in Amsterdam, hospitals in which there is a meditation hall, a chapel for the people to sit, to pray, to meditate. This is very important, because the people who are sick need a place to practice, and when their families come, they also need a place to practice. And when a relative undergoes surgery, members of their families, in order to deal with their worries, should be able to practice, and they need a center like that. There should be brothers and sisters who are trained in the art of meditation in order to serve in these hospitals. I think I am going to write



a letter to the monks and nuns in Vietnam, and also to the government, about how to set up a meditation hall in every hospital of the country.

And I think that a meditation hall is needed in each school for students and for teachers. I know teachers sometimes suffer very much because of their students and they need to practice, and students also need to practice; therefore, to have a meditation hall or a chapel in school, that is very important. We have the right to ask for that. You know that all spiritual traditions, they would tell you that you need the same kind of thing. It is neither a Buddhist, nor a Christian, nor a Jewish practice, it is just practice; because all of us need peace, restoration, and so on. So in the twenty-first century I'm confident that people, including yourself, will try your best in order to set up meditation halls in schools and in hospitals.

[Bell]

I would ask also for a meditation hall in each city's central park. The park is something like an island of peace. When the people in the city are suffocated, they don't feel well within their body, in their mind, they would think of the park. If they are in the middle of the week, they cannot get out of town, then the park is the answer. That is why you have to take care of the central park. We have to make all the trees and streams of water clear and beautiful; we need silence in the park. And we need a meditation hall without any symbols, whether Buddhist or Catholic or Jewish. We don't need symbols, because it is for everyone. In Bois de Boulogne, Bois de Vincennes, even in the Tivoli park, we need a meditation hall. Of course, in a park we would need ice cream and hot chocolate, but we must have a meditation hall. By the way, I don't like children to eat too many ice creams in Plum Village. I think a child is entitled to have one only each day, that is the maximum.

And I want a meditation hall in the parliament house, in the city hall, because I have seen people debating in the house of parliament. This is war, this is not peace. They hit each other with poisonous arrows of speech. They are angry, they don't have peace at all, and we don't want people without peace to represent us in parliament. Do you? No. If they don't have peace, they don't have harmony within themselves and with the other members of the parliament, then they make decisions that go against our interests. So if you are a writer, if you are an artist, if you are a member of the parliament, if you are a member of the city council, or if you are only a householder, you have to do everything in your power to express your view that you want the person who represents you in the Congress and in the city hall to practice peace. Before you vote for him or for her, look; look carefully to see whether in his or her family, there is harmony or not. This is very important; we have to ask. We have the right to ask whether they have harmony with their partner, their children, because they are public people and they have to make everything transparent.

We should be able to know whether they can use loving speech, whether they can master their anger, whether they can practice somehow looking deeply. Because looking deeply is a matter for everyone, especially for those who have to confront very difficult problems concerning the economy, social conflicts, social injustice, and especially war with another country. If you have no right view within you, if you have no insight within you, you have no harmony, understanding, or compassion, you may declare war with another country and you draw the whole country into war. This is very important.

Therefore, there must be a meditation hall in Congress. It would be beautiful if Congressmen or Senators, before starting a session, would sit together breathing in and out, in peace and make the determination to hold the session in peace and harmony and not just fight each other. This is very important. This is peace education, and who can realize that? You claim to be a democracy, so you have to do it. Citizens have to do it. So when we sit for Dharma discussion, we have to find ways in order to put into practice what we learn from the Five Wonderful Steps of Training.

At the city hall, we need it. Suppose the river that goes through our city is polluted, fish die in that river, who will be responsible? The whole city is responsible; but it is the city council that has to take the matter in hand, so they have to practice looking deeply together at how to save the river. In your home, in your neighborhood, you also organize for looking deeply at your

part; and at the city center, city council, they have to practice looking deeply at their part. And we may support them with our insight: “Dear city council, we are in that quarter of the city, we have sat down, we have practiced looking deeply, and this is what we have found out.” We can support our city council by the fruit of our practice of looking deeply. The city council, the city hall, has to make decisions based on this insight. If they don’t, next time they will not be in the city council. All this is practice, and we practice as a Sangha and not as individuals.

How about places like l’Elysee or the White House, where the president and the government meet to make decisions? How about the military headquarters? I think it is like in our home: there should be a place of peace for the president, for his ministers, to sit in, to breathe together, to calm themselves, before they look into the urgent matters of the nation. And you have the right to request that. You have to speak out your aspiration, after having practiced looking deeply. We don’t ask them to follow any particular religion; we just ask them to have a little bit more peace and calm and understanding and harmony within themselves, and we are ready to support them. We will write letters without anger, we will practice talking to them with loving kindness; but we have to do nonviolent action. Loving action has to be taken by us every day.

Decision-making is too important to leave to them alone; you have to take in hand your own fate, and therefore I want the children to hear this, because the twenty-first century is theirs. We adults are very sorry not to have been able to do it during the twentieth century, so we hope that in the twenty-first century you will be able to do that. We are already a little bit enlightened on the matter; we have suffered so much, and we have made you suffer. So we will be supporting you wholeheartedly, and many of us will be climbing with you the hill of the twenty-first century. Please, the people who are less young, also have Dharma discussions on this and make known your insight, your decisions. Now, the young people, when they hear the small bell, they would stand up and bow to the Sangha before they go out to continue their studies and practice.

Dear friends, the Buddhadharma is described as something that you can come and see by yourself. You don’t have to believe something through another person, even the clergy, the priest, the mediator. The ultimate dimension of reality is something you can touch, you can see by yourself. And you can do it now, and here; it’s not a problem of time. It’s not a promise. In the method of Buddhism as I see it, it’s very concrete; there’s no place to speculate, to suppose, to create an hypothesis. When the Buddha set out to teach and to help people, the first thing he asked people is to look directly into their suffering. Suffering is not an abstract thing; suffering is there, very real. Suffering is one of the basic truths called holy truths, the Noble Truths. Suffering is a holy truth. Why?

In Vietnamese we call it *thanh de*, the holy truth. The word that the Buddha used is *dukkha*; *dukkha* means ill-being, pain, suffering, translated by Chinese *kou*. This word, *kou*, originally in Chinese means bitter, the opposite of sweet. It makes you suffer. And you have to look at it. Why is suffering a holy truth? Because, without suffering, you have no way out. The first thing you have to do is to look, and look deeply, into the nature of your suffering. If you cannot do that, if you try to run away from it, there’s no way that you can transform your suffering. That is why suffering is the basic truth and a holy truth. It means we have to learn from our suffering. We have to understand our suffering. If we don’t know anything about our suffering, if we cannot learn anything about our suffering, suffering is no longer a holy truth. Holy or not holy: it depends on our way of handling suffering. And the Buddha said suffering is absolutely necessary for you to find a way out.

A Zen teacher in Vietnam during the 13<sup>th</sup> century urged his students to practice diligently in order to get out of the world of birth and death. And a student asked him, “Teacher, please show us how to get out of the world of birth and death.” And he said, “You have to look for the world of no birth and no death.” Then the student asked, “But where can we find the world of no birth and no death?” And the teacher said, “You look for it right in the world of birth and death.” It means, out of suffering you will find the way of transcending the

suffering. It sounds like something contradictory, but it is the basic Buddhist teaching. So looking into the nature of suffering, you can see many, many things that you need to know. How that suffering has come to be, that is the second truth. That is about the nature of your suffering. If you already see the nature of your suffering, how it has come to be, you are already on your way to liberation. That is a sentence uttered by the Buddha. Dear friends, if you look into the nature of your suffering, and if you see already what kind of nutriment that has brought about that suffering, you are already on the path of liberation; because everything needs food to grow, to be there, including your suffering. So if you look into your suffering, and if you can see how that has come to be, what kind of food you have fed it so that it is now there as a hard fact, then you are already on the way of liberation, because you have already seen a path of liberation. So the nature of your suffering is the cause of your suffering, the nutriment, the food that you have used in order to feed your suffering.

For instance, if you suffer from a depression now, your depression is dukkha, suffering. So you look into your depression; you need your depression in order to understand your depression. You should not try to run away from it. Go back; confront your depression; embrace it and look deeply into it, and you'll find out after a few days of practice that in the past few months or few years, you have lived in such a way that made depression possible now. Because your depression cannot come just like that, without any cause. You have got the nutrition, the nutriments, the food that has brought about the depression. What you have eaten, what you have drunk, what you have listened to, what you have viewed, what you have touched, are the kind of nutriments that have made up your depression now. So if you know the nature of your depression, you also know how to stop feeding your depression. And you use other kinds of nutriments for yourself, and a few months later, your depression will be gone.

Suppose the person you love just betrayed you and goes with another person. In the beginning you had hope that he and you would live a long life together, sharing everything, and he or she has made the solemn promise to live together until your hair becomes white, until all your teeth come out. But now, he just abandoned you and followed a young woman. You feel the victim of injustice. You cannot just accept that. You cannot accept the betrayal. You want him, you want her to be faithful.

Your suffering is there, and we advise you to embrace your suffering and look deeply into it and look into how that kind of betrayal has come to be. Who is responsible? What kind of nutriment has made it possible? That is the Buddhist way. You are advised to do it by yourself, if possible with the help of other brothers and sisters in the Dharma. They can do it with you. They can join their mindfulness and the practice of deep looking with you, and help you to discover the nature, the cause of your suffering. If I sit with you, if I practice with you, I may find out that you have been somehow responsible for his act of betrayal.

In the Buddhist teaching, we learn that we have all kinds of seeds within our consciousness. This is our consciousness; it is made up of two levels, at least. The deeper level is called store consciousness. In Buddhist psychology, we speak of consciousness in terms of seeds, *les semences*. The Sanskrit word is *bija*. We learn that in the store consciousness, we have all kinds of seeds within here. Seeds of compassion, mindfulness, tolerance, endurance, peace, joy, loving kindness. We have all the good seeds in us. And the Buddha is also there as a seed, the seed of Buddhahood, the seed of enlightenment, the seed of concentration, the seed of loving kindness, the seed of mindfulness. It is a fact, and not just a dogma, that you have the Buddha nature in you. You can touch it, you can make a demonstration, you can verify it. Because, according to this practice, mindfulness is the Buddha and loving kindness is the Buddha; understanding is the Buddha; and all of us have the potential of being mindful, of being understanding, of being compassionate.

Children have proved that at times they can be compassionate, mindful, understanding; and adults also. That is the Buddha nature in us. When I ask you to drink your glass of water mindfully, you can do it, you can drink your water mindfully. That means mindfulness is possible for you; you have a seed of mindfulness within your store consciousness. That is why

you can practice, and you can be successful in drinking your water mindfully, or in walking mindfully. That is a demonstration that Buddha is in you, because mindfulness is very often described as the energy of a Buddha. A Buddha, a real Buddha, is made with that kind of energy. You have it. You don't need to believe, because you already have direct knowledge about it. It's not exactly a religious belief; this is just an experience.

But in your store consciousness there are other, negative, seeds, like the seed of ignorance, the seed of forgetfulness which is the opposite of mindfulness. Strange, you have the seed of mindfulness and you have the opposite kind of seed. Mara is the equivalent of Satan. If you want to invite the Buddha, you can. If you want to invite Satan to come up, he will be glad to come up. And Buddha and Mara both are of an organic nature. That is the teaching of the Buddha. Buddha and Mara, mindfulness and forgetfulness, both of them are organic substance because they can deteriorate. It's like a flower and garbage. A flower can become the piece of garbage. The piece of garbage, if you know how to do it, will be transformed back into the flower. Mindfulness and forgetfulness play the role of flower and garbage in us, also Buddha and Mara, because we are a living reality; we are not a piece of inert matter in a museum of life. We are a living thing, therefore everything in us is alive, including Buddha and Mara. How wonderful: Buddha is alive in us, not a notion, a concept.

And you have that seed of jealousy in you. You have also the seed of betrayal in you. All of us are able to betray the people we love, not only he, but you. All of us have the seed of loyalty, all of us have the seed of betrayal. If you have not betrayed him, it is because the seed of betrayal in you has not been watered by yourself and by the people who live around you. But if you allow your seed of betrayal to be watered today, tomorrow, by yourself and by the people around you, one day you will betray him, you will betray her. That's something sure.

Now, practice looking deeply to see, what have you done in the past? Have you allowed the seed of betrayal in him to be watered? Who has watered that seed? Did you water that seed yourself? Have you made an effort to remain fresh and loving? If you have not made any effort to remain fresh and pleasant, then you yourself have contributed to the watering of the seed of betrayal. People usually love what is lovable. If you have stopped being lovable, then you help the other way. Have you been very mindful in taking care of him? Have you allowed a situation to happen in which his seed of betrayal has been able to be watered every day? Outside of your mindfulness you have allowed everything to take place, and now you blame him, blame that person for your suffering.

Maybe the suffering, the cause of the suffering comes from yourself, mostly. You just think that you are a victim of injustice, all the suffering that you have now has come from the other person. You blame him or her entirely, and that is injustice on your part because you don't see the truth. You don't know how to handle your suffering, you don't know how to look into that holy truth, suffering, in order to see the real nature of that suffering. The first truth is holy, that is suffering. The second truth is holy also, that is the nature of your suffering. You need mindfulness, you need looking deeply, you need concentration in order to find out that holy truth.

The third truth is that your suffering can be healed, can be transformed. Because it is not a hope, it is a fact that if something has come, it can go away. If you used some kind of nutriment to bring up something, now if you don't want that something to stay, you just cut the nutriment. That is the simple truth, the truth of the absence of suffering. Suffering can be transformed, that is the third holy truth. It's rather comforting. There are people who say Buddhism is a little bit too pessimistic, they always begin with talking about suffering. But that is not pessimism; that is realism, realistic. Because when you peer into the truth of suffering, you see not only the second noble holy truth, but also the third noble truth, which is the possibility of removing the suffering. That's rather good news. You are confident that with some practice, you can end the suffering, you can bring back the state of well-being to you, and to the people around you. Because the first truth is the presence of ill-being, the third truth is the absence of ill-being, which means at the same time the presence of well-being.

That's *nirvana*; nirvana is the extinction of suffering and of all the nutriments that have brought suffering to you. Is it too late or not? It's never too late.

[Bell]

Suffering is still going on if you don't practice, or if the other person doesn't practice. So now, if you want to take the initiative, you don't demand anything, you don't require any preconditions, you just begin to stop feeding your suffering. You do it with your faith in the third noble truth, holy truth. "I have to stop feeding my pain, my suffering." And that kind of conviction, that kind of attitude can already bring you a lot of comfort. Then we learn that we have to practice expanding our heart. We should be able to realize many conditions of our happiness and peace. We should have several roots. The other day when I talked to the young people, I told them that if we are mindful, we can be aware of many things, many elements in us and around us that can make us happy. Don't commit yourself to just one idea of happiness.

There was a layman who was asked to give a Dharma talk to monks and nuns because he was so well versed in Buddhism. That happened in the 1930's in Hue. It was to him a very great joy to be able to help the monks and the nuns with his knowledge and understanding of the sutra. I think he was teaching the *Surangama Sutra*. Before coming to the chair to teach, he touched the earth three times before his students. One day, as he was walking up the hill to go to the temple to give his instructions on the *Surangama*, he saw two young boys on the sidewalk enjoying a chess game. He also enjoyed playing, so he wanted to take a few minutes to sit with the little boys, and he enjoyed it so much that he almost forgot that he had to go to the temple and give the Dharma talk. Another friend of his, coming by, saw him like that. He said, "Dear friend, do you know what time it is now? Let us go!" And then he climbed the hill with the other person.

His name is *Tam Minh*, Clarity of the Heart. He had the capacity of being happy with whatever was there around him and in him. To give a Dharma talk to the monks and nuns was a joy, but to sit down with children was also a joy. And not only that; everything around him could make him happy. So we should not commit ourselves to just one thing. We should not ruin our life just because of one thing. A French poet said, "*Un seul être me manque, et tout est dépeuplé*," "Only one person is not there, and I see the whole world as empty." Why? Why behave like that? Because there are many living beings around; why look upon them as nonexistent? How could that being be there if all of us were not there?

So look deeply into the nature of your suffering and practice loving kindness, practice understanding, so that you will not continue to blame. You see your responsibility, you see your way of salvation, of liberation, you are able to touch many wonders of life that are available to you in the here and the now, and suddenly you become the most attractive person, very refreshing, very healing. And everyone will go back to you, because we need you. If you are fresh, happy, peaceful like that, every one of us will need you, will look in your direction, they would follow you, especially those of us who are suffering a lot.

The Five Steps of Training are really the way. The way as presented by our teacher, the Buddha, is the Eightfold Noble Path. Right understanding, right speech, right thinking, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. If you practice the Five Steps of Training, you practice the Eightfold Noble Path in a very concrete way. If you put all your being into the practice, if you abide by the practice of mindfulness of consuming, of speaking, of listening, then that is the suppression of the suffering because you don't allow the nutriment for suffering to continue any more.

The other day, we were speaking about the First, the Second, and the Third Steps of Training: to protect life, to practice giving, social justice, and to preserve the integrity of couples and families and protect children from sexual abuse. All these things are right action, right view, right efforts. The moment when you undertake to practice these precepts, trainings, you already begin to get relief. I will offer you an example. There was a Vietnam war veteran who came and participated in a retreat offered by us to about thirty or forty former soldiers, army officers, who had fought in Vietnam, together with twenty or thirty other people, including

psychotherapists and family members and so on. I remember we had to practice listening deeply every day and with a lot of patience in order to allow a situation where the veterans can speak out. It's very difficult, because many of them were caught in their own suffering, it's very hard for them to touch their suffering, and to talk about it. Sometimes I had to sit there for half an hour not saying anything, just breathing and smiling, and show our compassion, our readiness to listen. Yet no one could speak a word. And we begin again.

There was a war veteran who tried to join us in walking meditation, but he was so fearful. During the war he had learned that you can get into an ambush very easily, and there were many Vietnamese there. A Buddhist monk can be a guerrilla in disguise. So he was scared to death. He tried to join others for walking meditation, but he kept a very big distance; he walked behind us about thirty meters. He thought that if anything happened, he would have time to run for cover. Instead of staying in the dormitory with us, he camped in the forest and he set traps around his tent. That was our first retreat organized for war veterans in America.

One of the retreatants finally told us his story, that had never been told before. During a battle in Vietnam, most of his friends were killed in an operation, and he saw his companions die. So he got very angry. He wanted to retaliate. He brought out a number of sandwiches, he put explosives inside the sandwiches, he left them on the place where children would play, and he hid himself and watched. He saw children coming. They were very happy to see this kind of sandwich, and ate them. And just ten or fifteen minutes later, they began to scream, and their mothers came out, trying to get them to the hospital, but the American soldier knew that nothing could be done in order to help the children. He had wanted to do so out of his anger and the will to retaliate. Since the time he went back to America, he could not live with that kind of image in his store consciousness. He told us that every time he found himself together with a few children in a room, he had to run out of that room as quickly as possible. He just couldn't bear it, for more than twelve years. His mother encouraged him to deal with the present time, to forget the war, the war was over; but for him, the war was never over. Until he came to the retreat.

I told him, "Yes, I know that you have killed children. You have ambushed them as your way to retaliate. I know you have caused suffering. But I want you to know also that there are many children who are dying around the world, everywhere. Many die just because they need just one medicine pill. Many children die because they need a glass of milk, soy milk. Many step on grenades and bombs that are left over there. If you know how to use your time, now, you can save many of them, even every day. You have the capacity of acting, of living in mindfulness, in compassion, and I know you will be able to save the lives of many children, now. Why don't you make a determination to receive the First Precept of not killing, of protecting life? You receive that precept in the presence of the whole Sangha.

"And you take action right away. You go out and you save children who are dying in the present moment, children even in America. In America there are children who are dying every day because of stupid causes. Children in Southeast Asia, in Africa, everywhere. You know that you have an American passport. You can go almost everywhere, not like the boat people. The boat people, because they don't have a piece of paper, they are thrown back to the sea and die; but you, you are different. You are an American citizen. You can go where you want, and you can help many children from dying. So make the determination. Receive the First Precept, and act." And the teaching was already a drop of Dharma nectar. When a drop of Dharma nectar fell into his heart, it opened. He was transformed right away, in that moment. And he made the determination to receive the First Precept and to go out and help.

Suddenly, you become a bodhisattva with a lot of energy within you, and that is exactly the kind of energy that you need to heal. Why remain immobilized, paralyzed in your suffering? Why continue to be the victim of your sorrow? The Five Steps of Training can open up the door for you to transform your life, to transform the lives of living beings on Earth. Because that is the way of loving, protecting, and offering joy and peace. This is not an idea, this is not a dogma, this is not a promise. The Buddhadharma is something you can come and see by

yourself, and touch by yourself. The healing can take place right away, the moment when you embrace the Dharma.

A writer, a woman writer with a lot of talent, she came to me and confessed that she was abused as a little girl and she has carried that kind of suffering within her. She doesn't feel that she's a normal person. I helped her to practice. I said, "Sit down and practice looking with me. Are you angry at that person? Don't you think that he was sick? It was only sick people who do that kind of thing to children and ruin their life. Do you see the suffering in that person, how that person has been brought up? There are many of them like that to be helped. You know, you are a writer. You can help these people. You can do more; you can help the children who are about to be molested by these people. You have the energy, the talent that you need.

"You have to make the vow, the determination to receive the Third Precept: I am aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct in family circles. I have seen children molested and suffer for their whole life, and I now undertake to practice the Third Precept in order to protect the integrity of families, individuals, and children. I am determined to learn ways to do that with my Sangha, because I know that if I continue to recite the Five Steps of Training, to hold Dharma discussions with my Sangha, and learn better ways to practice them, then I will be able to help." During a Precepts transmission ceremony, the Sangha is there with their best presence and they witness to the fact that you are undertaking the path. During that moment, transformation takes place already, because you receive a lot of energy the moment you decide to receive and practice the Steps of Training.

[Bell]

The healing takes place very quickly, and you put your heart into the practice. Concerning the Fourth Precept, we see that it is the art of deep listening and loving speech. We know that a lot of suffering has been created by our lack of capacity to listen deeply and with compassion to the other person. If there is no communication possible between you and her or him, that's because you don't practice; you are not able to listen with calm, with compassion. Avalokiteshvara is the one who shows the talent of listening deeply with compassion. When we evoke the name of Avalokiteshvara, we must be determined to learn his way of deep listening, compassionate listening.

In order to be able to listen with calm and compassion, we should train ourselves in the art of mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful sitting, so that every time we hear things that shock our ears, that are provocative, that go against our common sense, we will not get irritated. Because the moment we show our irritation at the anger, the other person will stop talking. So we have to listen in such a way that encourages the other person to continue to talk, because it's very healing for him or for her. You are the best therapist if you know the art of compassionate listening. You listen because you have compassion; you want to relieve him or her of the suffering and not because you want to listen in order to analyze, or judge, or condemn, or correct.

Compassionate listening is just to give the other person a chance to empty what is in their heart. Because he has had no one to listen to him, he has become more and more like a bomb, ready to explode; she also. So you are afraid of him, of her, you don't want to approach, because you are afraid of the explosion. And as you try to avoid him or her, they think that we despise them, we want to boycott them and the suffering will increase. So the only alternative is to train ourselves in the art of deep listening, compassionate listening, and go to him or her to help. If you cannot do that, who in the world can? Because you may be the closest person to him or to her. So the Fourth Step of Training is about deep listening and using loving speech.

How to practice that? Sit quietly, and maintain your mindful breathing, and nourish your compassion. Remind yourself that you are listening in order to relieve him or her of the suffering and not for anything else. Then when the other person says things that are wrong, incorrect, full of injustice, misunderstanding, you can continue to listen with serenity. That is the act of Avalokiteshvara. Many of us are able to do that after some time of practice and that

is very healing. If at some point you feel that your capacity of listening has come to a limit, you cannot go on for another five minutes, so you have to bow and say “Darling, could we continue later on? I need to do something right now, I would love to continue to listen.” Don’t try too hard; because you should know your limit. I also practice that. I learn about my limits. I know that I should not try to do more than I can.

This is one thing I repeat over and over again to the people who attend retreats on helping professions: nurses and doctors and psychotherapists, social workers and so on. Because they see suffering a little bit too much, and they try too hard and they get burnt out very quickly. So you practice more, get refreshed, and then you offer another session of compassionate listening. If you are to explain to him or her about his or her misunderstanding, about your own suffering, then you should, we should, be able to use loving speech. We can tell the truth, but in such a way that the other person can see, can understand. We speak not for expressing our anger, just trying to help the other person to see. And that is why calm, serenity, and loving kindness should be there while we speak. Every time we feel some irritation coming up, we cannot swallow our suffering, and then we should stop. We should ask for another chance to do it; don’t continue. We should know our limit.

That is about the Fourth Step of Training, the only kind of practice that can restore communication. That is something we have to practice as individuals, as partners, father and son, mother and daughter; and we have to practice as nation with nation, because our nation suffers, yes. But the other nation also suffers. We have to recognize that. We should not believe that we are the only nation that suffers. The other nation may be suffering at the same time, and on our part there may be misunderstanding, so we continue to blame each other and kill each other. The warring parties always do that.

If there is another nation that can come in and help, that’s wonderful. But helping here does not mean to take sides, but to help both sides to calm down, to be able to tell the other side of the suffering in this side. Loving speech and deep listening should be applied between nations. That is why at the United Nations you also need the practice of listening. At peace talks, we do need that kind of discipline; and that is something, I hope, that will be possible to start in the twenty-first century.

Concerning the Fifth Precept, the Fifth Step of Training: Mindful consumption is the key word. Because you consume many things: food, drink, conversations, relationships, television, magazines, the so-called controlled items. Many of the items we consume contain toxins that bring war into our body and bring war into our consciousness, and water the negative seeds in us.

Mindfulness of consumption is the only way to protect yourself from ingesting poisons every day. Practice and protect yourself and protect your children from that kind of unmindful consumption. That is the Fifth Precept, very important. How could you get rid of your depression if you don’t practice the Fifth Step of Training?

The Five Steps of Training are to be studied more deeply by Dharma discussions, so that we may learn better ways of practicing mindfulness: mindfulness of speech, mindfulness of listening, mindfulness of consumption, mindfulness of protecting life, and so on. Who is the author of the Five Steps of Training? Who has created them? It’s you yourself. It is our mindfulness that has brought about the insight of the Five Steps of Training. The Buddha was one of the people who have contributed to the art of mindful living. He proposed the Five Precepts, yes. But since that time, many generations have come and practiced, and contributed their insight in the practice. The Five Steps of Training as presented to you today are the fruit of many generations’ practice. If during your practice you find out other things, you have insight that can improve the way to present the Five Steps of Training, to modify the wording, then you are among the coauthors of the Five Steps of Training. This is not something imposed on us by a deity, by a god. This is a collective product of those who practice mindfulness, and out of their insight, they see the path, they see the Fourth Truth, the Truth about the path of liberation.



For those of us who have practiced the Five Steps of Training, we see it as the way for the world to get out of these difficult situations. The Five Steps of Training are also instruments for dialogue with people of other spiritual traditions. This is the way we adopt so that a future would be possible for our children and their children. Have you tried something similar like this? What do you have to tell us, to help us to improve our practice? That is why during the conference organized by Gorbachev in San Francisco, the State of the World Forum, I did not talk much about other things. I just talked about mindful living and the Five Wonderful Precepts.

So all of you who have received the Five Steps of Training, learned the art of mindful living, I hope that you have the opportunity to deepen your understanding of these Steps of Training. I hope that you will continue to have a Sangha where you are, so that you can continue to explore, to deepen your understanding. Then you'll be able to share them with many people around you, so that we have a future for our children and their children for the twenty-first century, and don't repeat the same kind of errors and mistakes that we have made during this twentieth century.

## **Mara and the Buddha – Embracing our Suffering**

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on August 6, 1996 in Plum Village, France.

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Dear friends, today is the 6th of August, 1996 and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We are going to speak English today.

I would like to tell you a story that took place a number of years ago. One day I saw the Venerable Ananda—you know who he is? Ananda is a cousin of the Buddha, a very handsome man with a very good memory. He memorized everything the Buddha said, and after the Buddha passed away, he repeated exactly what the Buddha said during his life. Then other monks tried to learn and memorize also. Later on, all this was put down into writing and that is why we have the Sutras today. “Sutras” means the teaching of the Buddha in written form. They exist in Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, and in Vietnamese, but originally it was in a kind of Bengali, very close to Pali and Sanskrit.

One day I saw the Venerable Ananda practicing walking meditation in front of the hut of the Buddha. You know, Ananda became a monk, a student of the Buddha. He was the attendant of the Buddha during many years. He took very good care of the Buddha. Of course, the Buddha loved him and there were people who were jealous of him. Sometimes Ananda was so concerned about the happiness of the Buddha that he forgot about himself. Sometimes he did not enjoy what was there in the present moment, being much younger than the Buddha.

One day standing on the hill looking down, the Buddha saw beautiful rice fields. The rice was ripe, about to be harvested. But because Ananda was only thinking of how to make the Buddha comfortable, he didn't see it. So the Buddha pointed to the rice fields below and said, “Ananda can you see it's beautiful?” It was like a bell of mindfulness—suddenly Ananda saw that the rice fields down there were so beautiful. The Buddha smiled and said, “Ananda, I want the robes of the monks and the nuns to be designed in the form of rice fields—golden colors like the rice that is already ripe, small portions of the rice fields like that.” Ananda said, “Yes, that is possible, I will go tell my brothers and from now on we will make the *sanghati*, the robes of the monks and nuns, in the form of rice fields.”

Another time when Ananda was with the Buddha, north of the Gangha River in the city of Vaisali, the Buddha pointed to the city, the trees, and the hills, and said to Ananda “Don't you see Vaisali is beautiful?” Then Ananda took the time to look at the beauty of the city.

The day I saw Ananda practicing walking meditation around the hut of the Buddha, he was trying to protect the Buddha from guests. Many guests came, and they always wanted to have a cup of tea with the Buddha, and the Buddha could not just receive guests all day. So Ananda was trying to help. That day Ananda was practicing walking around the hut of the Buddha. It's not exactly a hut, but a cave—the Buddha was staying in a cave, very cold. And Ananda saw someone coming, coming, coming in his direction.

He had the impression that he knew this person, but just forgot his name. When that person had come very close, he recognized him as Mara. You know Mara? Mara is the one who had caused the Buddha a lot of difficulties. The night before the Buddha attained final enlightenment, Mara was there to tempt him. Buddha was tempted by Mara. Mara is the tempter. He always wanted the Buddha to be a politician, to be a king, or a president, or a foreign minister, or running a business, having a lot of money, a lot of beautiful women; and

he was always trying to tempt the Buddha so that Buddha would go into these directions. That is Mara.

Ananda saw Mara approaching. He felt uncomfortable. Why should Mara come at this time? But Mara saw him already—Ananda could not hide himself—so he had to stand there and wait for Mara and they had to say things like, “Hello, how do you do?” People say that even if they don't like each other. They say, “Hello, good morning, how are you,” and so on. They don't mean it. Then they come to the real thing: “What are you here for Mara?” “I want to visit the Buddha,” Mara said, “I want to see him.” Ananda said, “Why should you want to see the Buddha? I don't think the Buddha has time for you.”

You know when the head of a corporation or a director of an office doesn't want to see you she says, “Go and tell him I am in conference.” And Ananda was about to say something like that, but he remembered that he had to practice the Five Precepts and could not tell a lie. So he refrained from saying that the Buddha is in conference. He was frank. He said, “Mara, why should the Buddha see you? What is the purpose and are you not ashamed of yourself? Don't you remember that in the old days, under the Bodhi tree, you were defeated by the Lord? How could you bear seeing him again? I don't think that he will see you. You are the enemy of the Buddha,” and Ananda continued to say what was really in his heart.

You know Mara was very aware, a very experienced person. He just stood there and looked at the young Venerable Ananda and smiled. After Ananda finished, he said, “What did you say Ananda, you said the Buddha has an enemy?” Then Ananda felt very uncomfortable to say that the Buddha had an enemy. That did not seem to be the right thing to say, but he just said it. He said, “I don't think that the Buddha will see you, you are his enemy,” So if you are not very concentrated, very deep, very mindful, you may say things like that against yourself, against what you know and what you practice. When Mara heard Ananda say that he is the enemy of the Buddha, he burst out laughing and laughing and laughing, and that made Ananda very uncomfortable. “What, you're telling me that the Buddha also has enemies?”

So finally Ananda was defeated, completely defeated. He had to go in and announce the visit of Mara, hoping that the Lord would say, “I have no time for him, I need to continue sitting.” But to his surprise, the Buddha smiled beautifully and said, “Mara, wonderful! Ask him to come in.” That surprised Ananda. Remember Ananda was young with not a lot of experience. All of us are Ananda, you know. So Ananda had to go out again and bow to Mara and ask him to come in because the Lord wanted Mara to be his guest.

The Buddha stood up, and guess what? The Buddha did hugging meditation with Mara. Ananda did not understand. The Buddha invited Mara to sit on the best place in the cave—a stone bench. And he turned to his beloved disciple and said, “Ananda, please make tea for us.” You might guess that Ananda was not entirely happy. Making tea for the Buddha—yes. He could do that 1,000 times a day. But making tea for Mara was not a very pleasant idea. But since the Lord had asked, Ananda went into a corner and began to make tea for them and tried to look deeply, why things were like that.

When the tea was offered to the Buddha and the guest, Ananda stood behind the Buddha and tried to be mindful of what the Buddha would need. You see, if you become a novice, you have to practice being an attendant to your teacher. You stand behind him or her and you try to know what your teacher needs each moment. But it did not seem that the Buddha needed anything. He just looked at Mara in a very loving way and he said, “Dear friend, how have you been? Is everything okay?” Mara said “No, not okay at all. Things go very badly with me. You know something Buddha, I'm very tired of being Mara. Now I want to be someone else, like you. You are kind, wherever you go you are welcome. You are bowed to with lotus

flowers, and you have many monks and nuns with very lovely faces following you. You are offered bananas and oranges and kiwis and all kinds of fruits.

“As a Mara I have to wear the appearance of a Mara. Everywhere I go I have to speak in a very tricky language. I have to show that I am really Mara. I have to use many tricks, I have to use the language of Mara, I have to have an army of wicked little Maras and if I breathe in and breathe out, every time I breathe out I have to show that smoke is coming from my nose. But I don't mind very much all these things. What I mind most is that my disciples, the little Maras, are beginning to talk about transformation and healing. They're beginning to talk about liberation, Buddhahood. That's one thing I cannot bear. So I have come to propose to you that we exchange roles. You be a Mara and I'll be a Buddha.”

When the Venerable Ananda heard that, he was very scared. Oh, his heart was about to stop! What if his teacher accepted the exchange of roles? He would be the attendant of a Mara. So he was hoping that the Buddha would refuse the proposal. Then the Buddha looked at Mara very calmly, smiling to him, and asked this question: “Mara, do you think it's a lot of fun being a Buddha? People don't understand me—they misunderstand me and put a lot into my mouth that I have never said. They have built temples where they put statues of me in copper, in plaster, sometimes in emerald, in gold. And they attract a lot of people who offer them bananas, oranges, citrus, and a lot of things.

“Sometimes they carried me on the street in a procession and I was sitting on a cart decorated with flowers, doing like this—like a drunk person. I don't like being a Buddha like that. So you know, in the name of the Buddha—in my name—they have done a lot of things that are very harmful to the Dharma. You should know that being a Buddha is also very difficult. If you want to be a teacher and if you want people to practice the Dharma correctly, that is not an easy job. I don't think that you would enjoy being the Buddha. The best thing is for each of us to stay in his or her own position and try to improve the situation and enjoy what we are doing.”

If you were there with Ananda and if you were very mindful, you would have had the feeling that Buddha and Mara were a couple of friends who need each other—like day and night, like flowers and garbage. This is a very deep teaching of Buddhism, and I trust that the children will understand—very deep. You may compare Buddha with the flowers, very fresh, very beautiful. And you may compare Mara with the garbage. It doesn't smell good. There are a lot of flies who like to come to the garbage. It's not pleasant to touch, to hold in your hand, to smell the garbage.

Yet all flowers become garbage. That is the meaning of impermanence: all flowers have to become garbage. If you practice Buddhist meditation, you find out about very interesting things—like about the garbage. Although garbage stinks, although garbage is not pleasant to hold in your hand, if you know how to take care of the garbage, you will transform it back into flowers. You know gardeners don't throw away garbage. They preserve the garbage and take care of the garbage, and in just a few months the garbage becomes compost. They can use that compost to grow lettuce, tomatoes, and flowers. We have to say that organic gardeners are capable of seeing flowers in garbage, seeing cucumbers in garbage. That is what the Buddha described as the non-dualistic way of looking at things.

If you see things like that, you will understand that the garbage is capable of becoming a flower, and the flower can become garbage. Thanks to the flowers there is garbage, because if you keep flowers for three weeks they become garbage, and thanks to the garbage there will be flowers. You now have an idea of the relationship between Buddha and Mara. Mara is not

very pleasant, but if you know how to help Mara, to transform Mara, Mara will become Buddha. If you don't know how to take care of the Buddha, Buddha will become Mara.

You see there are people who, in the beginning, love each other very much. They believe that without each other they cannot survive. Their love is so important. They cling to each other because they think that love between them is the only element that can help them survive. But because they don't know how to preserve the love and take care of their love, they get angry at each other, they misunderstand each other, and later on love is transformed slowly into hate. There are those who say, "I hate you, I don't want to see you anymore, I wish you would die." Those people in the past had proclaimed that they needed each other, they could not survive without each other, they loved each other, so love transforms into hatred. It's like a kind of flower transformed into garbage.

So what you learn today is very deep. Flowers and garbage are of an organic nature because both flowers and garbage are living realities. Buddha and Mara are also organic, and they need each other. It is thanks to the difficulties, thanks to the temptations, that the Buddha has overcome his suffering and his ignorance and become a fully enlightened being. The day before yesterday, I gave a Dharma talk on suffering, and I said that if you look deeply into the nature of your suffering, you will find a way out of it. So if you want a flower, you have to use the garbage. That is why the people who suffer a lot now should not be discouraged. Suffering is their garbage. If they know how to take good care of their garbage they will be able to make the flower come back to them, the flower of peace, of joy. The Buddha shows us the way to do so.

When I was in Moscow several years ago, we offered a retreat to Muscovites, and a few Christians from Korea held a kind of a retreat very close to ours. Some of them came to our friends and asked why they should follow the Buddha. The reason we should not follow the Buddha, according to them, is that Buddha is a mortal. "Mortal" means someone who has to die. In their mind what we need is someone who will not die. Since the Buddha is someone who has to be born and who has to die, he cannot help us—that is the meaning of the declaration made by those friends.

I think it's a wonderful thing to die, because if you are born and you die, it means you are a living reality, like the flower and the garbage: they are living things. We are for life. Anything that is not born, not dying, not growing, is not alive. To be alive means to be born, to grow, to get old, to die, to be born again, to grow, to get old, to die and to continue like that. How do you expect life to be possible without change? But there is one thing that the children may like to know. There is a difference between "flower" and "flowerness."

The flower may die, but not the flowerness. Even if a flower has become garbage, you know you can bring the flower back. If you are a good gardener, if you know how to use compost, seeds, water, you will be able to bring the flower back. This means a flower may die, but flowerness is something that is there all the time: because flowerness is not a thing, flowerness is the nature of a thing. So it is with Buddha and Buddha nature. Buddha nature is called in Sanskrit *buddhata*. We all have buddhata inside of us, this Buddha nature. If we want, we can make the Buddha be born every moment in our hearts. That is a very wonderful thing. You can make the Buddha be born in your heart every moment, because you have Buddhahood in you, you have the nature of the Buddha in you. Buddha is a living thing: Buddha is born, Buddha grows up, Buddha hides himself away, Buddha dies. But Buddhahood is there in us.

We might think that terms like "Buddha nature" are difficult because we don't know that this is something very simple, very simple. Children can understand very well. We have

floweriness in us; we have “garbageness” in us also. Don’t think that they are two enemies—no. They look like enemies—Ananda was not very skillful in seeing that—but they can support each other. In Buddhism, there is no fight between good and evil—that is the most wonderful thing in the Buddhist practice! There is no fight between good and evil. Good and evil are both organic matters. If you have understanding and wisdom, you will know how to handle both the flower and the garbage in you, you can make the Buddha be born every moment of your life, and peace and happiness will be possible. This is a very deep Dharma talk for young people. I hope that you will be able to deepen your understanding of this Dharma talk. Your big brothers and sisters and the Dharma teachers will help you. This may be a very important lesson that you will learn in your life.

[To the children:] When you hear the bell, please stand up and bow to the Sangha before you go out.

[Bell. Children leave]

In the beginning of this year’s summer opening, we reflected on the fact that, for healing to take place in our body and in our soul, we have to learn how to allow our body and our consciousness to rest. That is the practice of stopping, of calming in order for healing to start. We talked about the animals in the jungle. When they are wounded or get sick, they always look for a quiet and safe place to lie down. They just lie down for many, many days. The animals do not think of hunting or eating or doing anything, because they feel they need to rest and they know that only resting can bring healing. They don’t think of eating at all.

We humans we might think that if we don’t eat anything, we grow weak and we cannot heal. We are not as wise as these animals, because fasting is a very wonderful way to help the body and also the soul to heal. Not thinking of doing anything—eating, running, making projects for the future, even for healing, practicing intensive meditation—all these things have to be stopped. No effort should be made either by the body or by the consciousness. We have to allow our body to really rest and also our consciousness. That is *samatha*, that is the practice of stopping and calming, and we have to learn it.

There are many of us who have no capacity for resting, of allowing our body and our mind to rest. That is because in us there is a very strong tendency to do something—running. We have run without stopping in the last four or five thousand years. It has become a habit. We even run in our dreams, during our sleep. So we have to start the practice of stopping. That is why practicing being in the present moment, touching the wonders of life that are present in this moment, is a very wonderful and easy way of resting.

There’s a tendency for us to think that our happiness should be searched for in the future, by doing something. Even our health should be “searched for” by doing something. But we don’t know that not doing anything may be the key to restoring our health. Many of us are obsessed by the idea that we have to get more nutrients. We buy vitamins, “one-a-day,” and we take one pill every morning and things like that. Many of us are motivated by that kind of desire. Not many of us are aware that we have a reserve in our body that we can use for up to three or four weeks without eating. Those of us who practice fasting and drinking only water, can go for many weeks and we don’t have to stop the daily things. We can still go to sitting meditation, walking meditation, cleaning in the kitchen, in the bathroom, participating in Dharma talks. We can do that many weeks without eating. In the process, we enjoy doing these things. And the toxins we have, from the third day on, begin to get out because we are drinking a lot of water, we are practicing a lot of walking meditation and deep breathing and we clean our bodies, so the toxins can get out. And after three weeks, you look much better—even if you don’t eat anything. Your skin, the expression on your face, your smile—you may

look like a new person. That is not because you take a lot of vitamins, or eat a lot of nutrients, it is because you don't eat anything. You allow your body to rest.

The same thing is true of your consciousness. There are a lot of toxins within that have been accumulating over the years. We have ingested the toxins—the fear, the craving, the anger, the despair—in our daily life by touching this or that without mindfulness. So all these poisons have brought into being our depression, our anxiety, our sorrow—and this kind of garbage should be transformed, eliminated. If only we could allow ourselves to touch the refreshing and healing elements in our daily life, a process of detoxification would take place. Are you able to breathe in and to breathe out, and enjoy it? Just breathing in and breathing out. Is there anything interesting in breathing in and breathing out? Breathing in and breathing out is a wonderful thing. You are alive. The fact that you are breathing in is already a miracle. There are many people who want to breathe in but they cannot breathe in because they are already dead. We want them to breathe in but they lie there, lifeless. So to allow your body to breathe in and to become aware that you are breathing in, that you are alive, can be a source of deep happiness.

This morning I practiced like that in sitting meditation. When you breathe in, you might touch nature around you; when you breathe out, you allow yourself not to do anything, you rest completely.

[Bell]

The practice of samatha, stopping, is the practice of doing nothing—trying not to do anything, just allowing your body and your mind to rest. We know that it's not easy, because we have already a habit of running and working, both in our body and in our mind. That is why putting yourself in a Sangha where there are people who are able to stop is very important. When you come to a retreat, where there are people who have the capacity of stopping, of being there in the present moment, you can profit from their presence, their energy. They are able to be happy with the blue sky, with a little flower blooming in the grass, with each step they make. Happiness is being manufactured every moment. They don't run; they are able to stop and to live deeply every moment of their daily life. It's very important that we find ourselves among those people, because touching them, we will be able to do the same after some time.

When you are on your cushion or walking, you just practice breathing in or breathing out in order to be there, just to be there. Because your mindful presence is the agent of love and care for the pain, for the suffering in you. You have not been there for yourself. You have been running and you have neglected yourself. To be loved means to be embraced by the attention, by the energy, of the person you love. When the animal stops and lies down, it's doing that for itself. It allows itself time to rest and to heal—it is there for itself. We have to be there for ourselves. We are wounded, perhaps even deeply wounded in our body and in our soul. Who will be there for us? We have to be there for ourselves first. And the Buddha will be there for us, because the Buddha is inside of us.

To be able to establish oneself in the present moment, to know what is going on in that moment, to touch everything that is happening in that moment, is the practice. It does not require a lot of struggle; it does not require any struggle at all. Just allow yourself to be. There is a tendency to think that happiness, health, success are things you have to run to in order to get. That is why we have sacrificed the present moment. We have viewed the present moment as a means to get things in the future. That is a tendency to be stopped.

We are committed to a certain idea of happiness. We think that if we cannot realize this or that, if we cannot change this or that, then happiness will never be possible. Because of our

commitment to that idea of happiness, we are not at peace with ourselves. We are trying to do something, to realize something, but maybe happiness is already there. All the conditions for you to be happy are already there. You need to recognize them. How can you recognize them if you are not there?

Maybe you have not realized that the sun in the sky is a condition for your happiness. Just take one second to look, and you see that all life on Earth is possible because of the sun. All our food comes from light, from the sun. And when you look at the sun like that, you see the sun as your father, your mother—it is nourishing you every day. The sun is always there for you. And you might complain that “nobody is taking care of me, nobody loves me, nobody pays attention to me,” but the sun is one thing that is nourishing you every second of your daily life.

The earth, the trees, the water, the air, the baker, the farmer, the birds, the insects. There are those of us who have practiced stopping and dwell in the present moment, and we are able to touch the many conditions of our happiness that are available in the here and the now. We find out that we don’t need more, because these conditions are more than enough to be happy. Stopping is very important. As long as you continue to run, happiness is very difficult. Stopping. Stopping allows your body and your mind to rest. Stopping allows you to recognize the conditions for your happiness that are already there.

The two elements of Buddhist meditation are stopping and looking deeply. You can only look deeply into the nature of things when they are there, when you are able to stop. Samatha is stopping, calming, and *vipasyana* is looking deeply. Sometimes you only need to stop, and suddenly a deep vision of reality will come like that. When the waves on the lake are calm, the surface of the lake is calm without waves, the full moon just reflects in the lake—the lake doesn’t have to run and look for the moon. Allow yourself to be in the present moment; enjoy touching the refreshing and healing elements that are around you and within you. Whether we believe they are or are not there, they are there. Allowing yourself to touch these healing elements will allow the garbage to become compost, and the flowers to reappear in the garden of your heart.

When you are there for yourself, there is an energy that embraces you, embraces your pain, embraces your suffering, your fear, your despair. It also embraces the good, positive qualities within you. The capacity of being joyful again, of being happy again, of being loving and tolerant—these qualities are within us, and they need to be embraced in order to grow; these are flowers. And the fear, despair, and sorrow in us need to be embraced in order to become compost. They will nourish the flowers. The Buddha needs Mara in order to grow beautifully as a flower and also Mara needs the Buddha, because Mara has a certain role to play.

So suffering is very important for your happiness. You cannot understand, you cannot love, until you know what suffering is. The joy of having something to eat is possible only if you know what hunger is. In some areas of China, when people meet each other, instead of asking, “How do you do?” or “How are you?” they ask, “Have you eaten yet? Have you gotten something to eat?” Because we know there is hunger, death. So our love is expressed in a very simple way: Have you eaten yet? Have you gotten anything to eat yet?

The tendency is to want to remove and to clear away the blocks of pain and sorrow and despair in us. We just want the Buddha or God to be like a surgeon who can cut out anything we don’t want of ourselves, get it out of our system. In the light of non-duality, not only are we flowers, but we are also the garbage in us. We cannot just get rid of us. Sometimes we are love, sometimes we are anger; love is us, but anger is also us. So we have to treat both love and anger on an equal basis, like the Buddha was treating Mara. Mara didn’t understand.



Ananda also didn't understand. But the Buddha, he understood. He was teaching both of them the nature of non-duality between suffering and happiness.

The energy of mindfulness is the energy that allows us to be in the present moment, to embrace ourselves, our suffering, our despair, our sorrow; and also the seeds of joy and peace and love that have become weak in us because we have not been able to water and cultivate these seeds to help them to be stronger. So the practice is the practice of embracing, and it is clear that the energy with which you can embrace yourself is the energy of mindfulness. “Darling, I am there for you.” When we love someone we want to make such a declaration, “Darling I am there for you.” And you have to be really there for her. Your presence is the greatest gift you can make to the person you love. To be there, it's not easy. You have to be there with one hundred per cent of yourself. You have to be really mindful, with all your attention. That energy has the power of healing and of making the other person happy. In this case it is self-love, and we all know that the love we have for another depends on our self-love. If we know how to take care of ourselves, if we know how to nourish and to transform ourselves, we will be able to take care of the other person. So the object of love is our self first—our body and our consciousness. Embracing yourself in the present moment is the practice.

By being there entirely, you recognize that not only suffering is there, something else is there—the wonders of life, the refreshing and healing elements from within and around and you may like to practice touching them. Look at the sky; listen to the rain, smile to it. It's wonderful that it's raining, it's wonderful that the sky is blue this morning, it's wonderful that I am here, alive. It's wonderful that I can walk, it's wonderful that my heart still functions normally. There are so many things you can enjoy. When one tree in the garden dies you may forget that all the other trees are still alive. You let your sorrow dominate, and suddenly you lose everything. When a tree is dying in my garden, yes, I know it, but there are other trees that are still green, healthy. If you remember that, you will not be drowned by your sorrow, and you will have enough strength to save the tree that is dying or replace it with another tree.

Make your heart large so that you may be able to see that the conditions for your happiness are there, and injustice, cruelty, or meanness is not enough to ruin your life. You can accept it easily, because your heart is large, and you can receive it without resentment and anger. It's like when you throw some dirt into the river, the river would not be angry. The river is willing to accept that dirt, and it can transform that dirt overnight. There's so much water in the river, so much mud in the water that the amount of dirt that you throw into the river will be transformed overnight. If you throw that dirt into a container of water in your home that would not be the same thing. You know that the water in the container will no longer be drinkable, you have to throw it away. But when you throw that amount of dirt into the river, people from the city still continue to drink the water from the river because it's large. The river has the capacity of transforming and healing. So practice being like a river, that is what the Buddha recommended to us.

Practice being like the earth. Whether people throw on earth flowers, perfumes, rice, curries or they throw on it urine, excrement, the earth will be willing to accept all without any resentment, because earth is large and earth has the power to transform. And earth is always there for us. So the Buddha told Rahula, “My dear, practice like earth, practice like water in the river and you will not suffer because your heart is big.”

So coming back to embrace ourselves, to start the process of healing, to touch the positive elements does not seem to be a difficult practice. You only need a Sangha where there are people who are doing that and who enjoy just doing that. When you come to the Meditation Hall and sit down holding your plate of food, you may do it with a lot of pleasure. Don't think

of it as a hard practice. Yes, we don't talk during the whole meal, you sit quiet in an erect position during the whole meal. Yes, we do that. But many of us enjoy doing that. We don't have to talk, we don't have to think, we don't have to do anything: we just realize complete rest during the whole meal. To be able to share a meal with a Sangha in mindfulness, not to have to do anything at all, to just enjoy every morsel of your food, touching your food deeply without any thinking, without making any project in your mind is the practice, the practice of stopping and resting.

When you pick up a piece of string bean, look at it, smile, and call it by its true name, "string bean." And you realize with some mindfulness and concentration that the piece of string bean is a wonder of life, exactly like you—you are a wonder of life, you are a miracle. The piece of string bean has been made by clouds, sunshine, the earth, the minerals, the air, the water, everything. This piece of string bean is really an ambassador coming to you from the cosmos if you know how to receive it, how to be with it, how to chew it mindfully and joyfully. Eating a piece of string bean may give joy. What is the use of eating a piece of string bean? To get nutrition? No, you just enjoy the piece of string bean, you enjoy yourself, the presence of the bean, you enjoy the moment, being with yourself and with the Sangha.

We like to chew our food thirty times, forty times, fifty times. During that time we don't chew anything else, we don't chew our projects, our sorrow, our anxiety. Allow it to sleep, you are embracing it now by the practice of being there, mindful. Eating is a practice, a practice of not doing anything, a practice of stopping. And with some intelligence, we can make the time of eating a time of joy. It may be oppressive not talking, not laughing, not making movements. But they are only the habits; you have to learn the habit of resting, it's very important.

Sitting on your cushion during sitting meditation is also practicing resting, and practicing walking meditation, just touching the earth and realizing the wonder of being alive and walking on the earth, this is also the practice of resting. In every moment you allow yourself to be there and to take care of your sorrow, your anxiety, your pain. They may be sleeping quietly down there in the bottom of your consciousness, or they may be emerging on the surface. In any case, embrace them; embrace them with your true presence, because the energy of mindfulness is the energy of being there for you, for the people you love. The sun is there for you, the moon is there for you, the trees are there for you, the water is there for you, and you should be there for them also, especially for yourself. You are the person who needs you the most. Call your name, call your name in silence—that person has suffered, that person needs you desperately, you should go back and embrace her, embrace him.

[Bell]

Now let us do a meditation exercise. Let us visualize ourselves as young people who are caught in a situation of drugs. There are so many young people who are addicted to drugs in Europe, in America, everywhere. This is a big problem of the twentieth century, and we don't know whether we will be able to solve it during the first half of the twenty-first century. This is some garbage that needs to be taken care of. Who are these young people who every day seek desperately to have some money to buy some drugs? Even if you know how to get some drugs, you don't know how to get the money. You may have tried to steal the money from your parents, which is safer than stealing from other people.

There are so many of us who suffer in Europe, in Asia, in America. We are suffering, we are despair, we are sorrow, we need to be embraced. We are the garbage of humanity. We want to go back to being flowers. Who will help us? What kind of presence could be given to us? We suffer; we don't need suppression, we don't need the army, we don't need the police. We really need a kind of presence that helps us to transform, because we don't want to be in this

position. But we are in this position, a position where we have to seek every day a means to get some drugs. Where is humanity? Who can help us? Who can manifest their true presence in order to embrace us? Who knows that we are suffering? They think that we only need punishment. They don't know how difficult it is for us to get out of our situation.

The energy that we need is enlightenment, is mindfulness. We need people to know that we suffer, that we don't want to be like this for a long time, because maybe tomorrow it will be too difficult for us to continue and we may have to kill ourselves. So we need desperately some kind of presence that tells us they know that we are there, we suffer and they are there for us.

The people in the Church don't seem to understand us. There may be nice people in the Church, they may want to do something, but in a majority of the cases they are preaching to us a kind of teaching that cannot respond to our real need. They are trying to impose on us the kind of life that does not seem to fit us. Understanding and compassion does not seem to come from the direction of the Church.

Our parents, they don't seem to be happy with each other. They make each other suffer. They created hell in our family. We have not been able to see happiness in the family. We have not experienced harmony, compassion and love in our family life. They don't seem to understand us. They don't seem to love us. How could love be possible without understanding? We don't see anything beautiful in this life. Everything is ugly. We don't see anything meaningful in this life. We don't see anything true in this life, everything seems to be fake. So we are hungry ghosts, looking for something meaningful and true. Since we have not found anything, we have to forget we are there and drugs seem to be the only thing for us. This is a block of garbage produced collectively during the twentieth century.

Meditation on this scale means to produce a presence of enlightened people—governmental people, doctors, psychotherapists, educators, artists and so on. We have to come as a group, as a Sangha, to produce our true presence. “Dear people, we know that you are there, we know that you suffer, that is why we have come to you and embrace you, not with the intention to punish or to blame, but just to embrace you. We want to understand you better; we want to love you.” That is the presence they need: that is collective meditation. Maybe in coming together our insight will be deep enough to provide these people with a positive environment for their healing and their liberation—a healing center, rehabilitation center, where these young people can get the minimum dose of drugs they need every day so that they don't have to go and kill or steal in order to get the drugs. Where they can be taken good care of, and get help in order to reduce the amount of drugs and start the process of healing, touching the things that surround us that are healthy, that are refreshing.

If those of us who are doctors, governmental people, artists, psychotherapists don't practice for ourselves, we won't have insight and compassion and understanding; how can we help take care of the garbage we have produced? Who is responsible for producing this garbage? All of us. Blaming other people will not help, especially blaming the victims. We have to realize that they are us, we are them, that our life is made of flowers and garbage at the same time. We have to accept both and to take care of both in the best way that we can, with the understanding, the calm, provided by our practice.

The government of Holland has tried to do things, the government of France, of Spain, many governments; the government of the United States of America also has tried many ways to help. But where are we? Haven't we realized that we are responsible for the production of the garbage? Our society is produced in such a way that we create hungry ghosts very young, every day, by the thousands, by the hundreds of thousands. They are everywhere, wandering

around without anything to believe in, without anything to love, without anything that looks true and good and beautiful.

I don't know whether during the first half of the twenty-first century we can handle this problem of drugs, of the hungry ghosts that we produce. We have to call on people in all walks of life—parents, Church, teachers, businessmen and others—to stop and look. This is very important, stopping and looking at our present situation and considering how to start transforming garbage into flowers. We have to organize Dharma discussions on a very big scale. We have to organize it in our family, we have to organize it in our city, we have to make it into a national debate where people may have a say, where each person makes a contribution of his or her insight. That is a matter for all of us, that is meditation.

As individuals we have problems; but we also have problems as families, as cities, as nations, and meditation in the twenty-first century should be a collective practice. Without a Sangha we cannot achieve much. When we focus our attention on suffering, on the garbage on a larger scale, maybe the little problems that we have within our individual circle will vanish, because by practicing being there we begin to connect with, to relate to, other people who are also ourselves. That way our loneliness, our feeling of being cut off, will no longer be there, and we will be able to do things together. Like when we come to Plum Village, we try to be part of the Sangha, we practice as a Sangha. It's much easier, and transformation will take place much more quickly if you don't just practice as individuals. When I practice walking I make mindful and beautiful steps. I know that I do that not only for myself, but also for all of my friends who are here; because everyone, who sees me taking a step like that has confidence and is reminded to do the same. And when they make a step in the present moment, smiling and making peace with themselves, they inspire us all, they are doing that for all of us. You breathe for me, I walk for you, we do things together and this is practicing as a Sangha.

So today please enjoy your walking if it doesn't rain. If it rains, you enjoy the rain. We also have a formal meal together. A formal meal is a time when we sit together as a Sangha, we enjoy the collective energy of mindfulness, and each of us allows the mindful energy of the Sangha to penetrate in. Even if you don't do anything, just stop thinking and allow yourself to absorb the collective energy of the Sangha. It's very healing. Don't struggle, don't try to do something. Allow yourself to rest, and the energy of the Sangha will help. Eat your meal very slowly, mindfully; enjoy every morsel of food. That is the most important thing to do during eating, just enjoy every morsel of food, chew it carefully and slowly. That allows the pain, the sorrow in us to be embraced.

## **Meditations for the Sick and Dying**

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on August 11, 1996 in Plum Village, France.

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Today is the eleventh of August 1996, we are in the Lower Hamlet, and our Dharma talk will be in English. Today we are going to learn the practice of the four mantras, because this is the kind of practice that I would like everyone to bring home and do every day. It's very pleasant and it's easy. A mantra is a magic formula. Every time you pronounce a mantra, you can transform the situation right away; you don't have to wait. It is a magic formula you have to learn to recite when the time is appropriate. And the condition that makes it effective is your mindfulness, your concentration. It means that this mantra can only be recited when you are perfectly mindful and concentrated. Otherwise, it would not work. But you don't need to be mindful or concentrated one hundred percent; even eighty percent can produce a miracle. And we all are capable of being mindful and concentrated.

The first mantra is "Darling, I am here for you." I wish that children from Italy would practice it in Italian, French children would practice in French, Vietnamese in Vietnamese, and so on. We don't have to practice it in Sanskrit or Tibetan. Why do we have to practice this mantra, "Darling, I am here for you?" Because when you love someone, you have to offer him or her the best you have. And the best that you can offer your beloved one is your true presence. Your true presence is very important to him or to her.

I know a young man of eleven or twelve years old. One day his father asked him, "Tomorrow will be your birthday. What do you want? I'll buy it for you." The young man was not very excited. He knew that his father was a very rich person—the director of a large corporation—and he could afford to buy anything the young man wanted. He was extremely rich, so it was no problem at all to buy a birthday gift for his son. But the young man didn't want anything. He was not very happy, and not because he did not have many things to play with. He was not happy because his father was not with him—he was always absent. He never spent enough time at home. He traveled like an arrow. And what the young man needed the most was the presence of his father. He had a father, but it did not seem very clear that he had a father, because the father was so busy.

You know when someone is rich, he has to try to work very hard in order to continue to be rich; that is the problem. Once you are rich, you cannot afford to be poor. That is why you have to use all your time and energy in order to work, work, work, day and night, in order to keep being rich. And I have seen many people like that. So the father does not have time for his children. Although the children in principle have a father, they don't really have one. What they need the most is the presence of their father beside them. So the young man did not know what to say. But finally he got enlightened. He said, "Daddy, I know what I want." "What?" And the father was waiting for an electric train, or something like that. The young man said, "I want you!" And it is very true, that children—if they don't have their father or their mother beside them—are not very happy. So what they want the most is the presence of the person they love.

When you love someone, the most precious gift you can make to him or her is your true presence. That is why you have to practice in such a way that you are there. You are there one hundred percent and you look at him or her, and you say, "Darling, I am really here for you." That is the greatest gift that we can make to our most beloved one. But this is not only a statement. You know a mantra is not a statement. A mantra is something you utter out of reality—that means you have to be there one hundred percent in order for what you say to

become a true mantra. So in order to be really there you need one minute or two of practice—you breathe in: “Breathing in, I am calm, breathing out, I smile. Breathing in, I am really here, breathing out, I’m really here.” You do that a few times, and suddenly you are really there. It’s wonderful. You are not caught with your problems, you are not caught with your projects, you are not caught by the future, or by the past. You are really there, available, to the person you love. Then when you are sure that you are truly there—body and mind together—you go in the direction of the person you love, and looking at him or her mindfully, knowing that that person is really there and you are there, you smile and you say, “Darling, I am here for you, I am really here for you.”

To many of us that is the greatest gift that we can make to our beloved one. If the father understood that, he would practice mindful breathing or walking for a few minutes, he would stop all his projects, he would cancel one of his meetings and just sit down, really close to his boy, and he would put his arm around the little boy, and look into the eyes of his boy and say, “Darling, this time I’m really here for you.” That is a very wonderful moment, that is a moment when life is really real and deep: father is there and son is there. Love is there because they are there for each other, they are available to each other. When you love someone, you have to make yourself available to the person you love. And this is the practice of meditation—to make yourself available one hundred percent as a gift to the person you love.

So I’d like the children to write that formula down on a sheet of paper in their own language, beautifully, and decorate it with flowers and fruits and birds. When you go home, you stick that mantra on your wall and you practice every day with the person you love. “Darling, I am really here for you,” that is the first mantra. My friends in America have painted that mantra on a tee-shirt. If you want, you might like to make a tee-shirt and paint that magic formula in Italian or French or German or Dutch. When you wear that tee-shirt, “Darling, I am here for you,” you might just look at that person and point to the mantra on your tee-shirt and smile.

The second mantra is, “Darling, I know you are there, and I am very happy.” This is also a very easy mantra to practice. Because to love means to acknowledge the presence of the person you love. In order to acknowledge that he is there or she is there, you have to have the time. If you are too busy, how can you acknowledge his or her presence? And the most important condition for doing this mantra is that you be there one hundred percent. If you are not there one hundred percent, you cannot recognize his or her presence. When you are loved by someone, you need that person to recognize that you are there—whether you are very young or seventy years old or eighty years old, you still behave the same way. We always need the other person to acknowledge that we are here. We want to be embraced by his or her attention. Not only children need that but adults also need that. We need to be embraced by the energy of mindfulness of the other person. So if you are there one hundred percent and you go to the other person, you look at him or her, you smile and you say, “Darling, I know you are there and I am very happy.” That is to recognize the presence of the person you love and to say that you are very happy that she is still alive, available to us at any time. You know such a practice can make the other person very happy right away—you don’t need to wait five minutes. That is the Buddhadharma—effective right away. If you are shy, you have to learn. You have to lock the door, turn the light off, and try to practice the mantra, “Darling, I know you are there, and I am very happy.” And when you are sure that you can do it, open the door and go to him or her and practice.

You know, I practice that not only with people, but I practice that with the moon, the Morning Star, the magnolia flowers. Last year when I went to Korea, I was housed in a Protestant seminary and my little house was surrounded by magnolias, and it was springtime. The magnolia blossoms were very beautiful. They are a white color—like snow. I practiced

walking meditation among the magnolia blossoms. I felt so happy, so wonderful. So I would stop and look closely at each magnolia flower. I smiled, breathed in and out and I said, “Darling, I know you are there, and I am very happy,” and I bowed to the flower. I was very happy, and I thought that the magnolia flower was happy also, because when people recognize your presence and appreciate your presence, you feel that you are worth something. Of course, the magnolia flowers were very, very precious to me.

Sometimes I look at the full moon with mindfulness, I practice breathing in and out, and I tell the full moon the mantra: “Full moon, beautiful full moon, I know you are there, and I am very happy.” And I was really happy at that moment. I was a free person—I was not assailed by worries or fear or any projects. And because I was free, I was myself. I had the time and opportunity to touch the wonders of life around me, and that is why I could touch the full moon and I practiced the mantra with the full moon. This afternoon you might like to practice the mantra with somebody, or just practice the mantra with a tree or a butterfly, because they are all wonderful.

We are in the meditation hall and all of us can hear the sound of the rain. To me the sound of the rain is something wonderful. In the Upper Hamlet we have a veranda baptized the “listening-to-the-rain” veranda. If you are a free person you only need to sit there and listen to the rain, and you can be very happy already, because the rain is something wonderful. I very often think of the rain as bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. After several weeks without rain, the vegetation begins to suffer and when the rain comes you can see that all the trees and bushes are very happy. I think they enjoy the sound of the rain, as I do, very much. Sitting in the meditation hall or sitting in the “listen-to-the-rain” veranda, you can appreciate the sound of the rain and you can be very happy just sitting there.

So happiness is possible with mindfulness, because mindfulness helps us to realize what is there—so precious. Those of us who still have a mother, we should be happy. Those of us who still have a father, we should be happy. Those of us who still have eyes in good condition to be able to look at the moon, we should be happy. There are many things that can make us happy now. And that is the practice of mindfulness—namely, the practice of Buddhist meditation. So please write down the second mantra on another sheet of paper in your best handwriting, and decorate it with colors—with flowers, fruits, leaves, birds, and so on, and hang it in your room. I am certain that if you practice the first and the second mantra, you will make many people around you very happy. And don’t tell me that the practice is difficult—it is not.

[Bell]

The third mantra is also easy to practice. You practice this mantra when you see that the person you love suffers. She is crying, or he is crying. Or if they are not crying, they look very unhappy. If you claim to be a lover, then you have to know what is happening to the person you love, and mindfulness helps you to notice that something is wrong within that person. Of course, if you are there one hundred percent for him or for her, you will notice very soon that the person you love suffers. If you don’t know that the person you love suffers, you are not mindful; you are not an ideal lover, because there is no mindfulness in you. Those of us who claim to be true lovers should practice mindfulness, we have to practice meditation, because how can you love if you are not there? You can only love when you are there and in order to be there you have to practice being there, whether by mindful breathing or mindful walking, or any kind of practice that can help you to be really there, as a free person, for the person you love. So because you are there, you are mindful—that is why you noticed that the person you love suffers. Right in that moment you have to practice deeply, to be there one

hundred percent. You go to him or to her, and you pronounce the third mantra, “Darling, I know you suffer, that’s why I am here for you.”

When you suffer, you want the person you love to be aware of your suffering—that’s very human, that’s very natural. You suffer, and if the other person you love does not know that you suffer, if he ignores your suffering, you suffer much more. So it would be a great relief if the person we love knows, is aware, that we are suffering. Therefore your task, your practice as a lover is to come to him or her to offer your true presence and utter the third mantra, “Darling, I know you suffer, that is why I am here for you.” Before you can do anything to help, she suffers less already, because she knows that you are aware of her suffering. So the effect of the practice is instantaneous—quicker than if you make instant coffee—very quick. The more you are concentrated, the more you are mindfulness, the greater will be the effect of your practice. And children can practice this very well. Every time they see their brother or their sister suffer, every time they see Mommy crying, they should learn how to practice. They have to practice breathing in and out deeply and go to that person and take his hand or her hand and say, “Darling, I know you suffer and I’m here for you, really, I’m here for you.” This a great relief.

The fourth mantra is only for adults because it’s a little bit complicated. This third mantra, also, I would like you to write down in English, Italian, or German in your best writing style—calligraphy—and you should decorate it with a lot of love and care. Make it into a masterpiece. And don’t wait until you are home to make it—I am asking you now to write down the three mantras here and decorate them very beautifully. When you go home, put them on the wall of your room or maybe in the living room—it’s up to you. But my expectation is that you be able to practice them. And this is not the practice of children alone, this is the practice of everyone. Even if she is seventy or eighty, she still can practice; even if he is eighty he still can practice them and this can make a lot of happiness in the house. You try a few weeks, and you’ll see—the situation in the home will be transformed very drastically. Communication is restored. We are concerned with the happiness and the sorrow and the suffering of every other member in the family. And of course this practice is easy, simple, and everyone can do it.

Now when you hear the small bell, please stand up and bow to the Sangha before you go out.

[Bell—children leave]

In the time of the Buddha there was a lay person whose name was Anathapindika. His real name was Sudatta. Anathapindika was a name given to him by the people in the city because they loved him. He had a good heart. He was a rich tradesman, business man, but he spent a lot of his time and money taking care of poor people, people who were abandoned, children, orphans, and so on. That is why the title “Anathapindika” was given to him by the people of his city Shravasti—it means “the person who takes care of the isolated ones, the unhappy ones,” and so on. It was he who invited the Buddha to come and teach in his country. The Buddha before that stayed in the country of Magadha.

Anathapindika during one of his trips to Magadha found out about the presence of the Buddha. He was very greatly inspired by the teaching of the Buddha, that is why he invited the Buddha to his country, Kosala. And it is he who purchased the most beautiful park close to the city of Shravasti and offered it to the Buddha as a monastery—the first monastery in that country. Later on, it was called the Jeta Park, because the owner of the park had been the prince, whose name was Jeta. Anathapindika took great pleasure in serving the Buddha and the Sangha, and his family was a happy family because his wife and all the three children followed the teaching of the Buddha. But he was not given all the teachings of the Buddha,



because at that time people thought that lay people were too busy and should receive only the kind of teachings they could afford to do. So the deepest kind of teachings were only given to monks and nuns. It was Anathapindika who made it clear to the monks and nuns that there were lay people who were very capable of practicing the deepest teachings of the Buddha, and he said, “Please, Venerables, go back and tell the Lord that there are many lay people who are too busy and who cannot afford to learn and practice the deeper teaching of the Buddha, but there are among lay people those who are very capable of learning the practice and these teachings.”

Anathapindika was very sick, he was about to die—this was after serving the Buddha for about thirty years. The Buddha went to him and visited with him, and after that he charged the Venerable Shariputra—one of his best disciples—to take care of Anathapindika. And one day Shariputra learned that Anathapindika was extremely sick—he might pass away at any time—so he went to the room of his younger brother in the Dharma, the Venerable Ananda, and asked him to come along for a visit. So both of them went to the house of Anathapindika.

When Anathapindika saw both of them coming, he was very glad. He tried to sit up but he was too weak; he could not. Shariputra said, “My friend, just remain where you are. You don’t have to try hard to sit up, we will bring a few chairs and sit next to you.” And after having said that, Shariputra asked, “Dear friend, Anathapindika, how do you feel in your body? Is the pain in your body increasing or decreasing?” And Anathapindika said, “Venerables, the pain in me is increasing all the time; I suffer very much, it does not decrease.” And when Shariputra heard that he said, “Why don’t we practice meditation on the Three Jewels? Let us practice breathing in and out and focus our attention on the wonderful Buddha, the wonderful Dharma, and the wonderful Sangha.” And he offered guided meditation to Anathapindika and both of the monks also sat there and practiced together with the lay person who was dying. So, two monks supported a lay person practicing in this very crucial moment.

Shariputra was an extremely intelligent person. He was like the right hand of the Buddha, taking care of the community of monks, teaching many of them as a big brother, and he knew exactly what the dying Anathapindika needed. So he offered first of all meditation on the Three Jewels, because he knew very well that the greatest joy of Anathapindika was to serve the Buddha and the Sangha. He did everything to make the Buddha comfortable and the Sangha comfortable. Therefore meditating on the Buddha, on the Sangha, would bring joy and happiness that would counterbalance the pain in the body. All of us have to learn this, because in us there are seeds of suffering, there are seeds of joy. If you know how to touch the seeds of joy, they will be watered and the energy of happiness and joy will be strong enough to counterbalance—to make the person suffer less.

The Buddha is the one who has the capacity of being there, of being mindful, of being understanding, of being able to love and accept, of being joyful. There are the ten titles of the Buddha that people would repeat in order to touch those qualities—the joy and the peace of the Buddha.

After meditating on the Buddha, they meditated on the Dharma. The Dharma is a path that can bring relief and joy and peace to us right away—we don’t need to wait. The Dharma is not a promise of happiness in the future. The practice of the Dharma is not a matter of time—as soon as you embrace the Dharma and practice, you begin to get relief and transformation right away.

And the Sangha is composed of members who practice concentration, mindfulness, wisdom, joy, and peace. To let your mind touch these wonderful jewels—that can water the seed of

happiness in you. After about ten minutes of practicing like that, Anathapindika felt much better already.

Next time when you sit close to a dying person, you might like to practice this same way. You are there, present one hundred percent, with stability, solidity, and peace. This is very important. You are the support of that dying person, and he or she needs very much your stability, your peace. To accompany a dying person, you need to be your best—don't wait until that moment to practice. You practice in your daily life to cultivate your peace, your solidity. Then you look into the person and you recognize the seeds of happiness that are buried deep in him or her, and you just water these seeds. Everyone has seeds of happiness. We should know in advance. And at that moment you talk to him or to her, you use guided meditation, in order to help him or her touch the seeds of happiness within him or her.

Several years ago I was on my way to lead a retreat in the northern part of New York state, and I learned that our friend Alfred Hassler was dying in a Catholic hospital nearby. So we managed to stop and spend some time with him. Alfred was very active during the Vietnam war. He was director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation in New York, and he supported us wholeheartedly in bringing the message of peace from the Vietnamese people, and he worked very hard to get a cease-fire and a negotiation between the warring parties. He was dying there, and I and Sister Chân Không and about six or seven of us were in a limousine, and we arranged so that we could stop. Only Sister Chân Không and I were allowed to go in; the rest were waiting in the car. When we arrived, Alfred was in a coma and Laura, his daughter, was trying to call him back, "Alfred, Alfred, Thầy is here, Sister Chân Không is here!" But he didn't come back.

I asked Sister Chân Không to sing him a song—the song was written by me and the words are taken directly from the *Samyutta Nikaya*: "These eyes are not me, I am not caught in these eyes. I am life without boundaries, I have never been born, I will never die. Look at me, smile to me, take my hand. We say goodbye now, but we'll see each other right after now. And we'll meet each other on every walk of life."

Sister Chân Không began to sing softly that song. You might think that if Alfred was in a coma, he could not hear. But you must not be too sure, because after singing two or three times softly like that, Alfred came back to himself—he woke up. So you can talk to a person who is in a coma. Don't be discouraged, talk to him or to her as if he is awake. There is a way of communicating.

We were very happy that he recovered his consciousness and Laura said, "Alfred, you know that Thầy is here with you, Sister Chân Không is here with you." Alfred was not able to speak. He was fed with glucose and things like that. He could not say any word, but his eyes proved that he was aware that we were there. I massaged his feet and I asked whether he was aware of the touch of my massage. When Laura asked, his eyes responded that he was aware that I was massaging his feet. When you are dying, you may have a very vague feeling of your body; you don't know whether exactly your body is there. So if someone rubs or massages your arms or feet, that will help, that will reestablish a kind of contact and awareness that the body is still there.

Sister Chân Không began to practice exactly like Shariputra; she began to water the seeds of happiness in Alfred. Although Alfred had not spent his time serving the Buddha, the Sangha, he had spent a lot of his time working for peace. So Sister Chân Không was watering the seeds of peace work in him. "Alfred do you remember the time you were in Saigon and were waiting to see the superior monk Tri Quang? Because of the American bombing, Tri Quang was not willing to see any Westerners. And you had a letter from Thầy and you wanted to

deliver it to Tri Quang? You were not allowed to get in, so you sat down, outside his door, and you slipped under his door a message that you were going to observe a fast until the door was opened, and you did not have to wait long because just ten minutes after that, Tri Quang opened his door and invited you in? Do you remember that, Alfred?” And she tried to refresh the memories of these happy events.

“Alfred, do you remember that event in Rome where three hundred Catholic monks were demonstrating for peace in Vietnam? Each of them wore the name of a Buddhist monk in prison in Vietnam—because these Buddhist monks refused to be drafted into the army and obey the law of the army. Over here we tried our best to make their suffering known. So in Rome, three hundred Catholic priests wearing the names of three hundred Buddhist monks in jail in Vietnam made a parade, do you remember that?” All these kinds of memories came back to him.

Sister Chân Không continued to practice, exactly like Shariputra. At one point, Alfred opened his mouth and spoke. He said, “Wonderful, wonderful,” two times, and that is all. One or two minutes later he sunk again into his coma and never came back again. Six people were waiting in the limousine and that night we had to give an orientation talk to four or five hundred retreatants, so I recommended to Laura and to Dorothy, his wife, that if he came back, they should continue the same kind of practice: massaging and watering the seeds of happiness in him. And we left.

[Bell]

In the early morning of the next day we got a telephone call that Alfred died very peacefully, just one hour or an hour and a half after we had left. It looks like he was waiting for us, and after that kind of meeting he was completely satisfied and he died in peace.

When Sister Chân Không’s big sister was dying in California, she was suffering a lot in her body. In the hospital she was in a coma, but she suffered very much in her body; and she cried and she shouted, and all her children did not know what to do, because they had not learned anything from the Dharma yet. When Sister Chân Không came in and saw that, she began to chant. But her chanting was a little bit too weak compared with the moaning and crying of the person who was dying. So Sister Chân Không used a cassette recorder and a tape of the kind of chanting that you heard this morning, “Namo Avalokiteshvaraya, bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara.” She used an earphone and she turned the volume quite high. In just a few minutes, all the agitation, all the suffering, all the crying stopped, and from that moment until she died, she remained very quiet.

It was like a miracle, and all of her children did not understand why, but we understand. Because she also had the seed of the Buddha-dharma in her, she had heard the chanting, she had had contact with the practice—the chanting, the atmosphere of the practice. But because of having lived too many years in an environment where the atmosphere of calm, of peace, was not available, many layers of suffering had covered it up, and now the chanting helped her although she was in a coma. The sound broke through and helped her touch what was deep in her. Because of that miracle of linking with the seed of peace and calm within her, she was able to quiet all her agitation and crying and she stayed very calm until she died.

So every one of us has that kind of seed in us—seeds of happiness, seeds of peace and calm. If we know how to touch them, we can help a dying person to die peacefully. We have to be our best during that time—we have to be calm, solid, peaceful, and present in order to help a person dying. The Buddhist practice of touching the Ultimate should be practiced in our daily life—we should not wait until we are about to die in order to practice. Because if we know

how to practice touching deeply the phenomenal world in our daily life, we are able to touch the world of the Absolute, the ultimate dimension of reality in our daily life. When you drink your cup of tea, when you look at the full moon, when you hold the hand of a baby, or walk with a child, if you do it very deeply, mindfully, with concentration, you are able to touch the ultimate dimension of reality, and this is the cream of the Buddhist teaching—touching the Ultimate.

The other day we talked about the wave, living the life of a wave, but at the same time she can also live the life of water within her. She does not have to die in order to become water, because the wave is water already in the present moment. Each of us has our ultimate dimension—you may call it “the kingdom of God,” or *nirvana*, or anything. But that is our ultimate dimension—the ultimate dimension of our reality. If in our daily life we live superficially, we cannot touch it. But if we learn how to live our daily life deeply, we’ll be able to touch nirvana—the world of no birth and no death—right in the here and the now. That is the secret of the practice that can help us transcend the fear of birth and death.

After having guided Anathapindika to practice watering the seeds of happiness in him, the Venerable Shariputra continued with the practice of looking deeply: “Dear friend Anathapindika, now it is the time to practice the meditation on the six sense bases. Breathe in and practice with me, breathe out and practice with me. These eyes are not me, I am not caught in these eyes. This body is not me, I am not caught in this body. I am life without boundaries. The decaying of this body does not mean the end of me. I am not limited to this body.”

So they continued to practice, in order to abandon the idea that we are this body, we are these eyes, we are this nose, we are this tongue, we are this mind. They meditated also on the objects of the six senses: “Forms are not me, sounds are not me, smells are not me, tastes are not me, contacts with the body are not me; I am not caught in these contacts with the body. These thoughts are not me, these notions are not me, I am not caught in these thoughts and in these notions.” And they meditated on the six consciousnesses: sight, hearing, consciousness based on nose, consciousness based on tongue, consciousness based on body, consciousness based on mind: “I am not caught in consciousness based on the body. I am not caught in consciousness based on the mind.”

Then they meditated on the six elements: “The element of earth in me is not me, I am not caught in the earth element. The element of water in me is not me, I am not caught in the element of water.” Then they went on with the elements of air, space, fire, and consciousness.

Finally they came to the meditation of being and non-being, coming and going. “Dear friend Anathapindika, everything that is arises because of causes and conditions. Everything that is has the nature not to be born and not to die, not to arrive and not to depart.”

When we look at this sheet of paper, you might think that there is a moment when the sheet of paper began to be and there will be a moment when this sheet of paper will stop being.

We think that before we were born we did not exist, and we think that after we die we might become nothing. Because in our mind we have the idea that to be born means “from nothing we suddenly become something.” From no one you suddenly become someone—that is our notion of birth. But how is it possible that from nothing something could become something, from no one they could become someone? That is very absurd.

Look at this sheet of paper—we may think that the moment of its birth is when the paste was made into this sheet of paper. But this sheet of paper was not born out of nothing! If we look deeply into this piece of paper, we see already that it had been there before its “birth” in the form of a tree, in the form of water, in the form of sunshine, because with the practice of

looking deeply we can see the forest, the earth, the sunshine, the rain—everything in there. So the so-called “birthday” of the sheet of paper is only a “continuation day.” The sheet of paper had been there for a long time in various forms. The “birth” of the sheet of paper is only a continuation. We should not be fooled by the appearance. We know that the sheet of paper has never been born, really. It has been there, because the sheet of paper has not come from nothing. From nothing, you suddenly become something? From no one, you suddenly become someone? That is very absurd. Nothing can be like that.

So the day of our birth is only a continuation day and practicing meditation is to look deeply into ourselves to see our true nature. That means, our true nature is the nature of no birth and no death. No birth is our true nature. We used to think that to be born means from nothing we become something. That idea, that notion is wrong, because you cannot demonstrate that fact. Not only this sheet of paper, but that flower, this book, this thermos, they were something else before they were “born.” So nothing is born from nothing. The French scientist Lavoisier said, “*Rien ne se crée*,” nothing is produced. There is no birth. The scientist is not a teacher of Buddhism, but he made a sentence exactly with the same kind of words that are found in the Heart Sutra. “*Rien ne se crée, rien ne se perd*,” nothing is produced, nothing dies.

Let us try to burn this sheet of paper to see whether we can reduce it into nothing. Maybe you have a match or something? Be mindful and observe. . . . We know that it is impossible to reduce anything into nothing. You have noticed the smoke that came up. Where is it now? Part of the sheet of paper has become smoke, it has joined a cloud. We may see it again tomorrow in the form of a raindrop. That’s the true nature of the sheet of paper. It is very hard for us to catch the coming and the going of a sheet of paper. We recognize that part of the paper is still there, somewhere in the sky in the form of a little cloud. So we can say, “So long, goodbye, see you again tomorrow.”

It’s hot when I burn it—I got a lot of heat on my fingers. The heat that was produced by the burning has penetrated into my body and into yours also. It has come into the cosmos, and if you have a very sophisticated instrument, you can measure the effect of that heat on everything, even several kilometers from here. So that is another direction where the sheet of paper has gone. It is still there, in us and around us. We don’t need a long time to see it again. It may be already in our blood. And this ash, the young monk may return it to the soil and maybe next year when you try a piece of lettuce, it is the continuation of this ash.

So it is clear that you cannot reduce anything to nothing, and yet we continue to think that to die means from something you become nothing, from someone you just become no one. Is it possible? So the statement, “*Rien ne se crée, rien ne se perd*,” nothing is really born, nothing can die, goes perfectly with the teaching of the Buddha on the nature of no birth, and no death. Our fear is born from notions—the notions of being and non-being, the notions of birth and death. Before we were born we are taught that that was “non-being,” after we are born we believe that that is “being,” and after we die we think that that will be “non-being” again. So not only do the notions of birth and death imprison us in our fear but the notions of being and non-being have to be transcended. That is the cream of the Buddhist teaching—to silence all the notions and ideas, including notions of birth and death, being and non-being.

What is Nirvana? Nirvana is the blowing out of all notions, the notions that serve as the foundation of fear and suffering. The other day we were dealing with the notion of happiness. Even the notion of happiness can make us miserable, can create a lot of misery for us. That is one of the notions that should be transcended. There are basic notions that are the foundation of our fear and suffering: the notions of being and non-being, birth and death, coming and going. From where have you come and where shall we go? The idea of coming and going is also a notion that we have to transcend.

[Bell]

This is the guided meditation given to Anathapindika by Shariputra: Everything that is has the nature not to be born and not to die. No birth and no death. Not to arrive and not to depart. No coming, no going. When the body arises, it arises; it does not come from anywhere. When the body ceases, it ceases; it does not go anywhere. The body is not nonexistent before it arises. The body is not existent after it arises. When conditions are sufficient there is a manifestation, and if you perceive that manifestation, you qualify it as being. If conditions are no longer sufficient, you cannot perceive it, and you qualify it as non-being. You are caught in these two notions.

It's like if you come to Plum Village in April and you look, you see no sunflowers. Looking around you say that there are no sunflowers around here. That is not true. The sunflower seeds have been sown. Everything is ready by that time. Only the farmers and their friends, when they look at the hills around Plum Village, already can see sunflowers. But you are not used to it—you have to wait until the month of July in order to recognize, to perceive sunflowers. So if out of your perception, you qualify it as “being” or “non-being”—well, you miss the reality. Not being perceived by you doesn't make it non-being, nonexistent. Just because you can perceive it, doesn't mean that you can qualify it as existing and being. It is a matter of causes and conditions. If conditions are sufficient, then it is apparent, and you can perceive it; and because of that, you say that it “is.”

That is why, in deep meditation, we have to transcend all these ideas, all these notions, and we can see what other people cannot see. Looking into the flower you can see the garbage, you can see the cloud, you can see the soil, you can see the sunshine. Without much effort, you can see that a flower “inter-is” with everything else, including the sunshine and the cloud. We know that if we take away the sunshine or the cloud, the flower will be impossible. The flower is there because conditions are sufficient for it to be; we perceive it and we say, “Flower exists.” And when these conditions have not come together, and you don't perceive it, and then you say, “It's not there.” So we are caught by our notions of being and non-being. The ultimate dimension of our reality cannot be expressed in terms of being and non-being, birth and death, coming and going.

It is like the water that is the substance of the waves. Talking about the wave, you can speak of the “birth” of a wave, the “death” of a wave. The wave can be “high” or “low,” “this” or “other,” “more” or “less” beautiful: but all these notions and terms cannot be applied to water, because the water is the other dimension of the waves. So the ultimate dimension of our reality is in us, and if we can touch it, we'll transcend the fear of being and non-being, birth and death, coming and going. For Buddhist meditators, “to be or not to be,” that is *not* the question! Because they are capable of touching the reality of no birth and no death; no being, no non-being. You have to transcend both concepts—being and non-being—because these concepts constitute the foundation of your fear.

It would be a pity if we practiced only to get the relative kind of relief. The greatest relief is possible only when you touch nirvana. Nirvana means the ultimate dimension of our being, in which there is no birth, no death, no being, no non-being. All these notions are entirely removed. That is why nirvana means “extinction”—the extinction of all notions and concepts, and also the extinction of all suffering that is born from these concepts, like fear, like worries. When we begin to touch the phenomenal world, we see there is birth, there is death, there is impermanence, there is no-self. But as we begin to touch profoundly the world of phenomena, we find out that the base of everything is nirvana. Not only are things impermanent, but they are permanent as well. You transcend the idea of permanence, and you also transcend the idea

of impermanence. Impermanence is given as an antidote so that you can release your notion of permanence. And since you are caught by the idea of self, no-self is a device to help you to get release from the notion of self. Touching the Absolute, not only can you release the notion of self, but you can also release the notion of non-self. If you have a notion of nirvana, please do your best to release it as soon as possible—because nirvana is the release of all notions, including the notion of nirvana!

Anathapindika was a very able practitioner. When he practiced to this point, he was so moved that he got insight right away. He was able to touch the dimension of no-birth and no-death. He was released from the idea that he is this body. He released the notions of birth and death, the notions of being and non-being, and suddenly he got the non-fear. The Venerable Ananda saw him crying because of happiness, because of that kind of release. But Ananda did not understand what was really happening with the lay person Anathapindika, so he said, “Why, dear friend, why are you crying? Do you regret something, or did you fail in your practice of the meditation?” He was very concerned. But Anathapindika said, “Lord Ananda, I don’t regret anything. I practiced very successfully.” Then Ananda asked, “Why are you crying, then?” Anathapindika said, “Venerable Ananda, I cry because I am so moved. I have served the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha for more than thirty years, and yet I have not received any teaching that is deep like today. I am so happy to have received and practiced this teaching.” And Ananda said, “Dear friend, this kind of teaching we monks and nuns will receive every day.”

You know that Ananda was much younger than Shariputra. Thereupon Anathapindika said, “Venerable Ananda, please go home and tell the Lord that there are lay people who are so busy that they cannot receive this kind of deep teaching, but there are those of us, although lay people, who do have the time, the intelligence, and the capacity of receiving this kind of teaching and practice.” And those were the last words uttered by the lay person Anathapindika. The Venerable Ananda promised to go back to the Jeta grove and report that to the Buddha, and it is reported in the sutra that not long after the departure of the two monks, the layman Anathapindika died peacefully and happy.

This is a sutra, a discourse called “The Teachings to be Given to the Sick.” You can find it in the *Plum Village Chanting Book*, in English. We are working on a new version of the *Plum Village Chanting Book*, but in the present edition you already have this text. This text is available in Pali, in Chinese, and we have several other texts which offer the same kind of teaching. So I would recommend that we study this text and we do a Dharma discussion in order to deepen our understanding of the teaching, and how to put into practice this teaching of the Buddha in the best way possible.

If you are a psychotherapist, if you are a social worker, if you are the one who has to help a dying person, it’s very crucial that you study this kind of teaching and put it into your practice in your daily life. And if you are simply a meditator who would like to deepen your practice, then the study and practice of this sutra will help you to get more stability, get more peace, and especially the ground of non-fear, so that when the moment comes, you can confront it in a very calm and easy way—because all of us are supposed to die some day. Even if theoretically in the teaching there is no birth and no death, if we are able to live our daily life in such a way that we could touch the ultimate dimension, then that moment will not be a problem for us at all.

In my daily life I always practice looking at things around me, at people around me, at myself; and I can already see my continuation in this flower, or that bush, or that young monk, or that young nun or that young lay person. I see that we belong to the same reality, we are doing our best as a Sangha, we bring the seeds of the Dharma a little bit everywhere, we

make people around us happy: so I don't see the reason why I have to die, because I can see myself in you, in other people, in many generations. That is why I have promised the children that I will be climbing the hill of the twenty-first century with them.

From the top of the hill in the year 2050, I'll be looking down and enjoying what is there together with the young people now. The young monk Phap Canh is now twenty-one, and on the top of the hill he will be seventy-five! And of course I will be with him, hand in hand, and we will look down together to see the landscape of the twenty-first century. So as a Sangha, we shall climb the hill of the twenty-first century together. We'll do our best so that the climbing will be enjoyable and peaceful, and we'll have all the children with us because we know that we never die. We will be there for them forever



## **Suffering Can Teach Us**

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on August 13, 1996 in Plum Village, France.

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Dear friends, today is the 13th of August, 1996, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We are going to speak English.

The other day after I spoke about the practice of the four mantras. I said that the fourth mantra is more difficult, so I did not talk about it. In fact it is difficult, but not so difficult. After the Dharma talk, when we were about to do walking meditation, there was a gentleman who stopped me on my way and asked me about the fourth mantra. He was very eager to learn and to practice the fourth mantra. He was very curious, because I had said that the fourth mantra is more difficult. But after that I thought it over, and I thought that the children are able to understand and practice the fourth mantra, also. So today I am going to tell them how to practice the fourth mantra.

You need to practice the fourth mantra when you yourself suffer. Remember, the third mantra is to be practiced when the person you love suffers. You only need to go to him or to her with mindfulness, concentration, and you just proclaim the mantra: "Darling, I know you suffer. That is why I am here for you." But this fourth mantra is practiced when you yourself suffer. You believe your suffering has been caused by the person you love the most. That is why it is so difficult. When the person you love so much says something or does something that hurts you, you suffer quite a lot. Because if it were another person who said something or did something, you would not suffer that much. But this is the person you love most in the world, and he just did that to you, he just said that to you. That is why you cannot bear it. You suffer one hundred times more. This is when the fourth mantra has to be practiced.

According to this practice, you have to go to that person, that very person, the person you love the most, who just hurt you very deeply. You go to him or to her with full awareness, with full mindfulness and concentration, and you utter the fourth mantra: "Darling, I suffer, please help." This is quite difficult. But if you train yourself, you can do so. When you suffer and you believe that the person who makes you suffer is the person you love the most, you want to be alone. You want to lock your room, and cry alone. You don't want to see him or her. You don't want to talk to him or to her. You don't want to be touched by him or her. Leave me alone! You don't want him or her to touch you. This is very normal. It's very human also. Even if the other person tries to approach and to reconcile, you are still very angry. You say: "Don't touch me. Leave me alone. I don't want to see you, to be with you." That's the real feeling at that moment. Very difficult. I think that you have had that experience.

So is it possible to practice the fourth mantra? You go to him or her, and breathing in deeply, out deeply, become yourself one hundred percent and just open your mouth and say with all your might, your concentration, that you suffer and you need her help, his help. It seems that you don't want to do so, because you don't feel that you need his help or her help. You may need the help of all other people, but you don't need his help. You want to be independent. "I don't need you." That's what you want to say. That is the trouble; because you are deeply hurt. That's why you cannot go to him and to her and ask for help. Your pride is deeply hurt. And that is why the fourth mantra is so important.

In order to be able to practice this, we have to train ourselves for some time. Your natural tendency is to tell him or her that you can survive without him or her. You can be independent. You will not die because you lack his or her love. That is a natural tendency. But

if you know how to look at the situation with wisdom, you see that this is a very, very unwise thing to do. Very stupid thing to do. Because when we love each other, we need each other, especially when we suffer. It would be unwise to do the opposite. You are very sure that your suffering comes from him or her; you are so sure. But maybe you are wrong. She has not done that, she has not said that, in order to hurt you, but you misunderstand. You have a wrong perception. Wrong perception is the word.

I am going to tell you the story of Mr. Truong. It is a true story. It happened in my country many hundreds years ago. The people in my country all know about this story. There was a young man who was drafted into the army, so he had to go to the army and go to war. He had to leave his young wife home alone, pregnant. They cried quite a lot when they had to separate from each other. And they didn't know whether the man would come back alive, because no one knows. To go to war is very risky. You may die in just a few weeks, or in a few months, or you may get badly wounded. Or if you have a lot of luck, you will survive the war and go home to your parents, your wife, your children.

The young man was lucky enough; he survived. A few years later, he was released from the army. His wife was so happy to learn the news that her husband was coming home. She went to the gate of the village to welcome her husband, and she was accompanied by her little boy. The little boy was born while his daddy was in the army. So the moment when they met each other again, they cried and embraced each other and there were tears of joy. They were very grateful that the young man had survived and come home. It was the first time he saw his little boy.

According to tradition, we have to make an offering on the altar of the ancestors, to announce to ancestors that the family is reunified. He told his wife to go to the marketplace and buy flowers, fruits, and other provisions to make an offering to be placed on the altar. He took the little boy home, and he tried to persuade the little boy to call him daddy, but the little boy refused. "Mister, you are not my daddy. My daddy is another person. He used to come to visit us every night, and every time he came my mother would talk to him a lot, for a long time, and my mother used to cry and cry; and when my mother sits down, my daddy also sits down; when my mother lies down, he also lies down; so you are not my daddy."

The young father was very sad, very hurt. He imagined another man coming to his home every night and spending the night with his wife. All his happiness vanished just like that. Happiness was very short, followed by unhappiness. The young father suffered so much that his heart became a block of stone or ice. He could no longer smile. He became very silent. He suffered very deeply. His wife, shopping, did not know anything about it. So when she came home, she was very surprised. He did not look at her anymore. He did not talk to her anymore. He kept very cold, like he despised her. She did not understand. Why? She began to suffer herself, suffer deeply.

When the offering had been made, she placed it on the altar. Her husband burned the incense, prayed to the ancestors, spread the mat, made the four prostrations and announced that he was home, safe, with his family. You know, in my country, this is a very important practice. In every home, there is an altar for ancestors. On the altar you put the picture of one ancestor that represents all the ancestors. Maybe that is the grandma or the grandpa, and so on. Each morning, someone would come to the altar, wipe away the dust that had gathered on the table, light a stick of incense and bow, and offer that to all the ancestors. This is a very simple, but important practice every morning. So you always have incense sticks in the home.

Every time you come to the altar and light a stick of incense, you touch your ancestors. Touching your ancestors is a very deep practice. I don't know whether our Western friends would like to practice this way, but if they do, they will have the chance to touch their

ancestors every morning. Spiritual ancestors like Jesus, Buddha, the patriarchs, and the teachers. Blood ancestors like grandpa, great grandpa, great grandma, and so on. In Vietnam, this is a very popular practice. Every morning you light a stick of incense. You offer it to your spiritual ancestors and blood ancestors. You breathe in and out, and you touch your ancestors. This is very important, because if you get cut off from your ancestors, you will get sick, like a tree without roots. So I just propose this to you, to see whether it makes sense to set up a family ancestral altar in a European home or in a North American home.

Maybe this practice can help us to get healthier, and bring harmony back into the family. Every time there is something happening in the family, you have to go and announce to your ancestors. This is our practice. It has been there for many thousands of years. If your little girl or little boy gets a strong fever, of course you need to ask a doctor to come and help, but you have to announce this to your ancestors. You have to light a stick of incense, come to the altar, offer it, breathe in and breathe out, and you have to announce to your ancestors that the little girl, the little boy, is has a fever. You have the duty of announcing this to your ancestors because they have the right to know, because that is their great, great granddaughter or son. If you are about to send your son to college, you also have to announce that to your ancestors. They have the right to know. Or if you are about to marry your daughter to someone in the next town, you have to announce that to your ancestors. That is the practice. That is why when the young man came home to be reunified with his family, they had to prepare an offering to be placed on the altar and announce that kind of return to the ancestors.

After having offered incense, prayed and made four prostrations, the young father rolled up the mat and did not allow his wife to do the same, because he thought that his wife was not qualified to present herself in front of the ancestral altar. The young woman felt very ashamed—humiliated—because of that, and she suffered even more deeply. According to the tradition, after the ceremony has ended, they have to bring the offering down, and the family has to sit down and enjoy the meal with joy and happiness; but the young man did not do so. After the offering, he just left the house, went into the village, and spent his time in a liquor shop. The young man got drunk because he could not bear the suffering. In the old times, when they suffered so much, they used to go to the liquor shop and drink a lot of alcohol. Nowadays, people can use many kinds of drugs, but in the olden time alcohol was the only thing. He did not go home until very late, something like one or two o'clock in the morning, and he went home very drunk. He repeated that for many days: never talked to his wife, never looked at her, never ate at home, and the young lady suffered so much she could not bear it. On the fourth day, she jumped into the river and she died. She suffered very much. He also suffered very much. But no one was thinking of coming to the other person and asking for help, because pride—you have to call it by its true name, pride—was an obstacle.

When you suffer, and you believe that your suffering has been caused by the person you love the most, you prefer to suffer alone. Pride prevents you going to the other person and asking for help. What if the husband had come to her? The situation might be very different. That night, he had to stay home because his wife was already dead, to take care of the little boy. He had to search for the kerosene lamp and he had to light it up. When the lamp was lighted up, suddenly the little boy shouted: “Here comes my father!” So he pointed to the shadow of his father on the wall. “You know, mister, my father used to come every night like this and my mother used to talk to him a lot and she cried a lot with him, and every time she sat down, my father also sat down. Every time my mother lay down, he also lay down.”

It turns out that his “father” was only the shadow of his mother. In fact, she used to talk to that shadow every night, because she missed her husband so much. One day the little boy had asked her: “Everyone in the village has a father, why don’t I have one?” So that night, in order to calm the little boy, she pointed to her shadow on the wall, and said, “Here is your

father!” and she began to talk to the shadow. “My dear husband, you have been away for too long. How could I alone bring up our child? Please come back as soon as possible.” That's the kind of talking she used to do. And of course, when she got tired, she sat down, and the shadow would sit down. Now the young father began to understand. A wrong perception was wiped away. But it was too late; the wife was already dead.

A wrong perception can be the cause of a lot of suffering, and all of us are subjected to our wrong perceptions every day. That is what the Buddha said. We live with wrong perceptions every day. That is what the Buddha said. That is why we have to practice meditation and look deeply into the nature of our perceptions. Whenever we perceive anything, we have to ask the question, “Are you sure your perception is right?” To be safe, you have to ask, “Are you sure of your perceptions?”

When we stand there with friends, and look at the beautiful sunset, we enjoy the beautiful sunset, and we may be sure that the sun is setting, or has not set. But a scientist may tell us that the sun has already set eight minutes ago. The image of the sun we are touching is only the image of the sun eight minutes ago. He is telling the truth. Because it takes eight minutes for the image of the sun to come to us—that is the speed of light. We are very sure that we are seeing the sun in the present moment. That is one of the wrong perceptions. We are subjected to thousands of wrong perceptions like that in our daily life. It may be that the other person did not have the intention to hurt you, yet you believe that she has done that in order to punish you, to make you suffer, to destroy you. You carry with you a wrong perception like that, day and night, and you suffer terribly. Maybe you keep your perception until you die, with a lot of hatred toward a person who may be innocent. That is why meditating on perception is a very important practice.

What if the young man had gone to his wife and asked: “Darling, I have suffered so much in the last few days. I don't think I can survive. Please help me. Please tell me who is that person who used to come every night, and that you talked cried to a lot, and every time you sat down he would sit down.” A very simple thing to do. Go to her and ask. If he had done so, the young lady would have had a chance to explain, and the tragedy would have ended. They would have recovered their happiness so easily, the direct way. But he did not do so because he was so deeply hurt, and pride has prevented him from going to her and asking for help. He had not learned the fourth mantra.

If the man committed that mistake, the woman also committed the same mistake. She also suffered so deeply, but was too proud to ask. She should have gone to him and asked: “Darling, I don't understand. I suffer very much. I don't understand why you don't look at me, you don't talk to me, you seem to despise me. You seem to feel that I am not there at all. Have I done anything wrong to deserve that kind of treatment?” That's what she had to do. “Darling, I suffer. Please help.” That is the mantra. If she had done so, the young man, the young husband would have answered like this: “Why? Don't you know why? Who is that person who used to come every night, and you talked to him?” Then she would have had the chance to explain.

You know, after the young man found out his mistake, he cried and cried and cried. He pulled his hair. He beat his chest. But it was too late! Finally all the people in the village learned of the tragedy, they came and organized a big ceremony to pray for the poor lady. A ceremony of wiping out injustice committed by people like us, out of our ignorance and wrong perceptions. Together they built a shrine for her. That shrine still stands there. If you visit North Vietnam, going by that river you see that shrine.

We all have to learn from the suffering of the young couple. We should not make the same mistake. Next time, when you suffer, if you believe that your suffering has been caused by the

person you love the most, you have to remember this story. You have to be very careful. You have to learn now to train yourself, to prepare for that time. In that moment, you'll be able to practice the fourth mantra. Practice walking meditation. Practice sitting meditation. Practice breathing in and out mindfully to restore yourself. Then you go to him or to her and you practice the mantra. "Darling, I suffer so much. You are the person I love most in the world. Please help me." Without pride. If you let your pride stand in between you and her or him, it means that your love is not really true love, because in true love there is no room for pride. If pride is still there, you know that you have to practice in order to transform your love into true love. The children are young, they have plenty of chance to learn and train themselves for the practice. I am confident that even if you are still young, if you get the teaching and if you practice right now, it will be very easy for you to practice later on, when you suffer because you think that the person you love the most has done that to you, has said that to you. I don't think that you are going to use the fourth mantra often, but it is a very important mantra. Maybe you have to use it only once a year, or twice a year, but it is extremely important. So I want you to write it down, and keep it somewhere. And every time you suffer very much, please go and look for that mantra, and try to practice it.

The other day, in the New Hamlet, I was asked by a friend about the meaning of the meditation on the image of Jesus on the cross. What is the meaning of that kind of practice, contemplating the image of Jesus on the cross? At first I thought the question should be addressed to teachers in the tradition. We have often heard that when you contemplate the image of Jesus dying on the cross, you remember the fact that Jesus suffered and died for us. In the Buddhist study and practice concerning suffering, we know that suffering can teach us, we can learn a lot from suffering. If we look deeply into the nature of suffering, we may get insight on how we can get out of our situation. That is why suffering, *dukkha*, has been called in Buddhism a holy truth. Suffering is holy, because the contemplation of suffering can bring about insight on how to get out of suffering and transform it.

If you do not know how to make use of suffering, if you do not know how to learn from the suffering, then suffering cannot be a holy truth. We can sink into the ocean of suffering, we can be overwhelmed by suffering, and suffering is not a holy truth; it is only something destructive. That is why contemplating on suffering is a very important practice in Buddhism. Contemplating suffering, you will know how that suffering has come to be, because everything is born from conditions. And the contemplation on the nature of suffering will bring us insight on how that suffering has come to be, and the conditions that have brought this suffering to us.

Suppose we have a depression. We have to live with that depression right now. We may ask whether we are able to get out of that depression, make it go away, and the Buddha said yes. If you look deeply into the nature of your depression, you would know how it has come to you. You will look back and see how you have lived your life in the last six months or so, you will find out how that depression has come. When you have insight, you just decide not to feed your depression in the way you have done during the last six months. Then your depression will have to die or go away for lack of food, because everything needs food to survive, including your depression.

If I were to contemplate the suffering that Jesus underwent on the cross, I would ask whether Jesus bears his suffering, the injustice that was forced on him, well. In this summer opening we have had a few Dharma talks on the topic of forbearance. We have learned that if our heart is big, and if we have a lot of peace and joy and love then it would not be difficult at all for us to bear some injustice that people inflict on us. But if we are full of pain, suffering, anger, hatred, then it will be very difficult for us to accept the injustice people inflict on us. So I would find out whether Jesus bears the injustice that was inflicted on him well, whether in his

heart there was anger or hatred, whether he is trying to teach us how to learn from our suffering. The image of Jesus dying on the cross may be very instructive, very helpful to us.

But I also got a new insight. It was during a visit to Monbos that I made with a few young monks and nuns. We went into the church in Monbos, not very far from here, and we sat there for half an hour. During the time I sat there I contemplated Jesus on the cross, and I had the vision that Jesus should be presented in other forms, not only on the cross. We learned that Jesus had gone to the mountain and practiced meditation alone. During that time he spent on the mountain he may have been practicing walking meditation or sitting meditation. Our friends have to depict him in a sitting position or in walking meditation, radiating peace and stability. An artist within the church has to come forward and bring us these images of Jesus that convey stability, solidity, calm, peace, tolerance. That's what we need. That's what the young people in the church need.

Young people are looking for something like stability, like tolerance, like understanding, like love. Maybe they don't need to contemplate a lot the image of Jesus dying on the cross, but they need a very refreshing image of Jesus Christ, doing walking meditation or sitting meditation or holding children and playing with children. I really think so. Now people are attracted to the image of the Buddha, because the Buddha was sitting in a very solid, calm way, radiating peace and happiness, a half-smile on his lips. That is what we are very hungry for. We are very hungry for stability, for peace, for solidity, for tranquility. Anyone living in our time will feel that. That's what we need the most. And therefore the young people, when they go to church, they should be able to touch these elements embodied by the clergy and by the images, especially the image of Jesus Christ.

Jesus was young when he died, but not many people have tried to present him as having joy, vitality, peace. Jesus had a great vitality within himself. It was very active during the years of his teaching. He encountered many, many people. He helped so many people. And you know that when you are able to do something for people you get a lot of joy, of peace, of stability. That is why I try to speak for the young people. We need the image of Jesus smiling, sitting, walking, embodying the joy, the peace, the tranquility, the love. The young people need that image very much.

Also, during that question and answer session, there was one question about the necessity of expressing our emotions and anger. The friend who asked me that question began by saying that if he tries to be calm, his child continues to be nervous, but if he begins to shout then his child gets quiet and calm. I did not have the chance to address his question, this approach. I only told him "Well, you shout, and then your little boy gets calm and doesn't disturb you anymore, and you believe that it works. But if you look deeply into it, maybe it would not work in the future. Because by shouting like that, your child may get an internal formation, a wound within himself. And later on maybe communication between you and him will become difficult." So we cannot say that it works. It may work for one moment, but it may cause damage in the future.

I said that "when you shout, your shouting may come from love or might come from irritation. There is a difference." When you shout with irritation in you, that will create some negative things in you and also in your child. You have to measure the consequence of that. You cannot say that because you shout like that he accepts to become calm for a moment and you think it's a good way to proceed. There are many cases where a son or daughter cannot communicate to a father. Communication is just impossible, because maybe the father has been using his authority a little bit too much. The father has to learn how to deal with the little boy or the little girl as a friend. He needs to practice forbearance, patience. He needs to practice loving-kindness even with his little boy or little girl. He needs to learn how to

manage his irritation, his anger. A lot of tragedy has resulted from the way fathers and mothers deal with their children.

When there is a fight between parents and children, the losers are very often the children, because the children don't have the right to respond to their parents the way their parents do. They cannot use the same kind of language or reaction, because they are at the mercy of their parents—financially and in every aspect they have to depend on their parents. That is why, when their parents express their anger, the children have to receive the violence and they have no means to get it out—to express it, to transform it. If the parents don't know how to transform their violence, then the children will not know how to transform theirs either, because they have not learned anything from their parents. When children have become victims of the violence brought on them by parents, they suffer, and they don't know what to do. That violence within them becomes a poison that continues to kill them. If these young people try to kill themselves, it's mostly because they want to retaliate against their parents. By killing themselves, they want to send a message to their parents: "You know, I am killing myself because of you. You have made me suffer so much, and this is the fruit of your behavior, your way of dealing with me." So when a young man or young woman commits suicide, there is always that kind of message directed to parents or society or someone else, because the violence in him or her has no way to be transformed.

[Bell]

Most of us who sit here, we are at the same time children and parents. Even if we are still young, we can be already a big sister or a big brother, and already have to play the role of a parent. That is why we have to learn how to be children and to be parents at the same time. We have to learn how to manage, how to take care of the violence in us. The energy of violence, the energy of hatred and anger in us, is something that continues to destroy us, to shape our behavior. That is why we have to learn the practice of how to handle that negative energy and how to transform it. In the Buddhist teachings, it is clear that the practice of compassion and loving-kindness is the only antidote to violence, hatred, and anger. We have learned that compassion and loving-kindness cannot just be born like that, they need the practice in order to be born. That is the kind of energy that should be fabricated by us.

The practice of generating that kind of energy that can transform violence and hatred in us is the practice of looking deeply. Only the practice of looking deeply can bring about acceptance and understanding and love. When you practice breathing in on your cushion and visualize that you are a five-year-old boy or a five-year-old girl, and invite that little boy or little girl to be with you, you might touch that little boy or little girl in you with compassion, because that little boy or girl did suffer during your time of childhood. Your father at some point may have shouted at you, believing that shouting was the best way to keep you calm. He did not know that shouting like that could open up a wound within your little heart. The heart of little boy, five years old, is very tender, very vulnerable. Parents should be aware of these things. When you look at your little boy with a stern look, that is enough to scare him, to create terror in him, and to create a wound within his tender heart. For you, it's very normal that a father when irritated can shout and can look at his boy with such kind of eyes, but for a little boy of five years old, that may be too much. For a little girl five years old that may be too much.

So breathing in, I see myself as a five-year-old girl or five-year-old boy. And during the whole time of your in-breath, you allow that little boy or little girl to come back. He is still alive in you. I am sure. I know. The little girl, the little boy, is still alive very much, with very much the same kind of need and suffering. When he is there, she is there, you have to embrace him or her in your mindfulness. You have to say: "Darling, I know you are still there, and I am here for you." The first mantra, the second mantra. Breathing out, I smile to

that little boy who was me. That smile is already the smile of compassion. Because when you breathe in, you see yourself as a five-year-old boy or girl, very vulnerable, very fragile. That is why when you breathe out, your heart is already filled with compassion, and you embrace that little boy or little girl with your energy of compassion. There is already understanding.

Mindfulness of breathing revives an image, helps you to look deeply into that image, and helps you to generate the energy of compassion with which you embrace him or her. That is very healing, and you may continue this for some time, maybe ten, fifteen minutes.

I have in my hut a picture of me taken when I was sixteen and a half, a young novice. Every time I look at that, I still feel a lot of compassion. He did not know his path yet. He didn't know what difficulties were waiting for him, because I underwent a lot of difficulties, sufferings. So if you want to practice, you may like to use your family album, you may need a picture of you when you were five or four, and you generate compassion for yourself.

There was a young man who came to the Upper Hamlet, I think about eight or ten years ago, who was given that kind of practice because he hated his father. He could not bear the thought of thinking and writing a letter to his father. At that time all the monks and nuns and lay people received the assignment of writing a letter, a love letter, to his or her father or mother. For him, to write a letter to his mommy might be possible, but not to his daddy. Although his daddy already had passed away, he still could not reconcile with him. He just could not think of his father. He considered his father as the main source of his suffering. There are many men and women like that around us.

During the week that followed, I gave him the other half of the exercise: "Breathing in, I see my father as a five-year-old boy. Breathing out, I smile to that five-year-old boy that my father was." Maybe you have not had a chance to see your father as a little boy, but before he became an adult, he was a little boy. Very fragile. Very vulnerable, also. Suddenly, that fragile image of your father comes to you, and you see that he's no different from you. He was also as vulnerable as you, as fragile as you. He may be a victim of your grandpa. Every time his father shouted at him, every time his father looked at him with a stern look, he got a wound in his heart, just like you. He did not know how to transform that, so he was repeating the same kind of thing with you.

That's what we call the wheel of *samsara*, the vicious circle transmitted from father to son, from son to grandson. The violence we received, we don't know how to transform, and even if we hate our father, if we promised ourselves that when we grow up we will do entirely differently from our father, we will repeat the same. We will do exactly the way our father has done to us. That is the wheel of *samsara*.

I have seen many young men who are very determined that they will do the opposite of their father. But when they grow up, get married, and have children, they do exactly the same. The whole habit energy, the transmission, the *samsara*. So if you are touched by the Dharma, you have an instrument to cut through the wheel of *samsara*, you end the *samsara*, and you will not transmit that violence to the next generation.

"Breathing in, I see my father as a five-year-old boy. Breathing out, I smile to my father as a five-year-old boy." Vulnerable. Fragile. Fearful. That is the practice of looking deeply, because when you look like that, you see that the other person suffers like you, is also a victim like you. Suddenly the nectar of compassion is born in your heart. Suddenly you feel that you can breathe in and out again. The image of your father is no longer the same. He is now a little boy with a lot of suffering, a lot of fear, a lot of wounds within himself. You have



suffered, that is why you can understand the suffering of someone else, and that someone else is your father.

Fathers always have the tendency to love and make their children happy. That tendency is deep, it is natural. But because they have not learned the way to love properly, the way to handle their violence and anger, they have not been able to express their true love, and they have inflicted a lot of suffering on their children. We cannot say that there is no love in them, we can only say that the love in them has no way to be expressed. If we can begin to understand this, our heart will begin to open, and suddenly we can breathe and we can survive, because a drop of the nectar of compassion is already born in our heart. We no longer want to blame, because we have touched his or her suffering. We know that he does not need punishment, he needs help.

During his lifetime, no one has been able to help him, to transform his violence and his anger. He has not had a teacher, a Dharma brother or sister; and if I had not had a teacher, a brother or sister in the Dharma, I would have done like him, you see. So no blaming is possible now. Only compassion is the answer. So suddenly, you are on your cushion, and you feel that you can breathe, you can survive. And you can continue to practice. "Breathing in, I see my father as a suffering child. Breathing out, I embrace my father with my compassionate smile." This is very healing, very nourishing.

The young man placed on his table a picture of his father. He had asked for a picture of his father to be sent from America. He placed that on his desk. Every time he went out of his room he stopped by the door, looked into his father's eyes, and began to breathe in and out and visualize his father as a little boy. Every time he went into his room, he turned on the light on the table, looked at that picture, and practiced breathing in and out. A few weeks later, he was able to sit down and write a letter, the assignment. We call it a love letter, the first love letter. And he succeeded in writing the letter. Writing a letter like that untied a lot of bondage in him, because of the nectar of compassion that had been born in his heart. Your heart suddenly expands, there is now a lot of space, and now you can bear the injustice quite easily because you have an amount of understanding, of compassion that can digest, that can transform.

So the practice of looking deeply is the practice of expanding the heart, of putting more space and compassion into our heart. Bodhisattvas who have to bear a lot of injustice don't have any hatred or anger in their heart. That is why they accept, they digest, injustice and suffering very quickly. In the Christian gospel you read: "Father, forgive them because they don't know what they are doing." They are doing that out of their ignorance. That is also good meditation, a good practice of looking deeply.

When the little boy held the two wings of the butterfly in two hands and tore the butterfly apart, he didn't know what he was doing to the butterfly. He needs someone to tell him and to help him. I told him: "My dear, don't you know that tonight the father and the mother of the butterfly will have to spend the whole night waiting for the butterfly to come home? Don't you think that your parents would worry if you didn't come home tonight? Please be kind to the butterfly." The child understood right away. The next day when it was raining hard and a lot of snails were coming out on the path, he was picking up these snails with me and putting them back in the bush, saying we had to be careful, otherwise the snails could not go back to their parents that night.

So people are doing you injustice, are doing awful things to you and the people around. They may think that doing that is good. They don't know what they are doing. They do it out of ignorance. And hatred, anger, jealousy, all these things are born from ignorance. That is what

the Buddha said. So practicing looking deeply is to bring the kind of insight that will help us to understand, to accept, to love, to be compassionate.

[Bell]

When we have the energy of compassion in us, we can relate to the world very easily, because it is exactly that kind of energy that helps us to get out of our prison of loneliness. The people who have no compassion within their heart, they are very alone, because they have no ways to relate to other living beings. Having the energy of compassion in you, you are already a happy person. Every time you can do something to help another living being, the joy always returns to you. The teaching of love in Buddhism is quite clear. And also very deep.

Our love is there for the other person or persons. But according to this teaching, you have to practice looking deeply into the nature of your love. And you can always improve the nature of your love. There are kinds of love that bring us a lot of sorrow, a lot of jealousy, a lot of hatred, a lot of suffering, because they are not true love. True love within the Buddhist teachings has to contain the element of loving-kindness. *Maitri* is loving-kindness and loving-kindness is the capacity of offering happiness. This is the process of learning, because to make the other person happy, you need to be there. You need to learn how to look at him or her. You need to learn how to talk to him or to her. Making another person happy is an art that we have to learn. It's not because we bring him or her a lot of money that we can make him or her happy, but the way we live, the freshness we have, the tolerance we have. You are just there by his side or her side, and the other person enjoys your presence, enjoys your company, because your person contains loving-kindness, radiates loving-kindness. And whatever you do can bring him or her a lot of happiness. The word you say, a look you direct to that person, is enough to make him or her very happy.

According to the practice, you have to understand the real needs of that person, and again you have to practice looking deeply. If you do not know what the other person really needs, you will not be able to offer him or her happiness. And if you don't have time, how can you look deeply into the other person? So take time, practice looking deeply into him or her, and see what kind of needs she has or he has, and just bring him or bring her the things they need. Maybe what they need is not a lot: your attention, your capacity of listening to him or to her, your capacity of talking to her in a nice way. Well, these things are very important, and maybe they just need these things to be really happy. You know that you can train yourself in order to be able to offer these kind of joys and happiness.

The second element of true love is compassion, *karuna*. That is the capacity of removing the pain, transforming the pain in the person you love. Again, you have to practice looking deeply to see what kind of suffering that person has in him or her. Again, you see that you need to be really there in order to see. Your presence is necessary. Then, if you are mindful, you will know that the person you love suffers, and with some amount of looking deeply, you can identify the suffering in him or her. If you can look a little bit more deeply, you see the nature and the cause of that suffering. Only then can you practice compassion, *karuna*. If you don't show that you understand that suffering, then you cannot practice *karuna*. You have to really understand that suffering, and sometimes you can stop the suffering just by the way you behave, talk, and act.

Maybe you are the cause of that suffering. You have no capacity to listen deeply to that person. You have no capacity of talking to him or her in a calm and loving way; therefore, you cannot understand his or her suffering. Now, if you are able to train yourself and to practice loving speech and compassionate listening, you might by yourself transform the suffering in her or in him. That is true in most cases. That person might confront easily the

other difficulties in life if she is supported by you, she is understood by you, she feels that you are on her side. That is compassion and compassion is the fruit of meditation, looking deeply.

The third element of true love is joy, *mudita*. There are those who love each other, but who cry every day, who make each other cry every day. It means that their love is not true love yet, because the element of joy is not there. True love must bring you joy and happiness, and not sorrow every day. If your love is possessive love, you may behave like a tyrant, a dictator, so you make the person you love suffer every day, you make each other suffer every day, because of your narrow ideas of happiness, your wrong perceptions. That is why your love is not true love yet. The practice of looking deeply will help you to be less possessive, more understanding, and therefore you can offer the other person joy every day. I have seen true love. I have seen people loving each other and offering each other joy every day, maybe every hour, every minute. It is not difficult. It is not difficult. With some mindfulness, with concentration, with some training, you can do that.

The fourth and last element of true love is freedom, equanimity. If by loving, by being in love, you feel that you are losing your freedom, you have no space to move anymore, that's not true love. That is why in true love you have to offer yourself and the other person space and freedom. You know that when you arrange flowers, you should allow each flower to have some space around it in order for the flower to radiate its beauty. A person is also a flower. If he is deprived of freedom, and then he will not feel happy; therefore love in such a way that you can retain your freedom and that person also can retain her or his freedom. And this is possible.

There is a poem that I like about the moon. The refreshing moon, beautiful moon, is sailing through the ocean of the sky. The Buddha is the full moon that goes across the immense sky. If the river is calm, then the image of the moon will be reflected clearly in the river. Something like that. The image I like is the full moon traveling in the sky. You feel the freedom of the moon, because the moon has a lot of space around her. And the moon can benefit many people, can bring a lot of happiness to many people. It shines on everyone. It does not discriminate. It shines on the mountain and on the rivers. On this side of the frontier, on the other side of the frontier. That is equanimity. No discrimination. True love is *upeksa*, non-discrimination, and therefore no dictatorship.

## **All in one, One in All.**

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on August 11, 1997 in Plum Village, France.

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Good morning, my dear friends, today is the 11th of August 1997, and we are in the upper hamlet of Plum Village. I guess that everyone here has seen the lotus pond in the lower hamlet. Yesterday I conducted a walking meditation to the lotus pond, and then we went to the plum trees. It was very nice. We enjoyed the lotus and we also enjoyed the plum trees. Many of you were not there. But it looked like Paradise, it was Paradise, and it still is available. Later, you will realize that the lotus pond is not only in the lower hamlet, but in your heart. When you go home to your town and to your house, and every time you sit down quietly and you focus your attention on the lotus pond and the lotus pond will be born again from within you.

Our mind has all kinds of seeds in it. You have a seed of the lotus pond within you. Every time you use your mindfulness and you touch the seed of the lotus pond in you, you can see the lotus pond with all these flowers and big leaves like this. You don't have to go to the lower hamlet to really have the lotus pond. You may ask the question "Where has the lotus pond come from?" I will tell you.

Today I have my pebble bag, but instead of having six pebbles, I have something else in it. My bag is full of lotus seeds. And all the lotuses in the lower hamlet came from a tiny seed like this. We just begin with one seed. Can you look into this seed and see the whole lotus pond and hundreds of lotus flowers and lotus leaves? Can you imagine that all the lotuses and all the leaves of the lotuses come from this tiny little seed? Yet this is true. I'll tell you how to make this lotus seed into a lotus pond. It's easy. Please listen, because I'm going to offer each of you one lotus seed, so that when you go home, you'll be able to make a lotus pond.

You know that a lotus seed has to be planted in mud with water because it does not grow well in dry soil. You think that this seed can be just put into the mud and you can wait until it sprouts, but it will not sprout if you just put it in the mud, because the lotus seed is made of a kernel inside and also a very hard skin outside. Even if you leave the lotus seed three weeks or five weeks or ten weeks within the mud, it will not sprout, even if the mud is full of water. I know that there are lotuses that remain alive for more than one thousand years, and after one thousand years we plant it, it can still grow into a lotus plant.

So you should know how to help the lotus seed to sprout. This is the secret: you have to help the water to penetrate into the lotus seed. You may use a little knife, a little saw, and you cut just a little bit, about half a millimeter, so that the water has a chance to penetrate into the lotus and about four or five days later, the lotus seed will sprout and become a tiny lotus plant. If you hold a lotus seed like this and you rap it against a rock for one minute, this part of the skin of the lotus will be removed, so that that spot of the lotus skin will allow the water to get in, and five days after, it will sprout. You will see very tiny lotus leaves and the lotus leaves can get as big as this cup. You keep it in your yard if it is in the spring or summer or autumn, but when it is cold, you bring it into your house. It will continue to grow, and when spring comes you can bring it out, and you can change the container into a bigger one, and the lotus plant will become bigger and bigger. In one year you will begin to have a few lotus flowers, and in three years you will have a lotus pond as big as the one in the lower hamlet, and if you want it can be ten times bigger. Do you think that you can do it? You can make a lotus pond as big as this.

I will offer each child in this assembly one lotus seed, and I trust that you will keep it well and bring it home to make that experiment. You will learn that a huge lotus pond is contained within this. Ancestors of the lotus have transmitted all the talents, all the fragrance, all the beauties in this tiny seed, and if this seed knows how to practice, it will manifest all this talent, all these beauties, all these wonders from within it, and offer themselves to the world.

Each of you is a seed, a wonderful seed like a seed of lotus. You look a little bit bigger than a lotus seed, but you are a wonderful seed. In you there are a lot of talents. Compassion is in you. Understanding is in you. Love is in you. The capacity to smile is in you, the capacity to help other people be happy is in you. Because these wonderful virtues, these wonderful qualities, have been transmitted to you by your ancestors, your blood ancestors and your spiritual ancestors. If you know how to sprout and to grow, you will be a very beautiful lotus pond and you will offer a lot of happiness to many, many people around you, not only people, but animals, plants and minerals. A tiny lotus seed can make so many people happy. It has made me happy. A television man from Paris came to Plum Village and he saw some lotus flowers, and he reported on French television that lotus flowers bloom like mushrooms in Plum Village.

We have so many kinds of wonderful seeds within us, and if we know how to help the seeds to sprout, we'll be very happy and we'll be able to offer a lot of happiness to so many people. We already have a lot of good seeds in us, and we continue to receive seeds. When I look at you with loving eyes, and with the eyes of trust and admiration, a good seed is planted in you. I help plant a seed of faith, of confidence, of compassion in you, just by looking at you with the eyes of love and compassion. And we can help each other by planting the positive and beautiful seeds in each other. Every sound you hear can be a seed, a good seed or a negative seed. Every sight you see can be received as a seed in yourself, a positive seed or a negative seed. That is why in Plum Village we try our best to maintain a place where you can only see positive sights and positive sounds. In fact, Plum Village is a sanctuary of the Five Mindfulness Trainings. We come together here and try to protect the environment so that we will not see things that are not the dharma. We will not hear anything that is not the dharma. Everything translates the Five Mindfulness Trainings, and that is why while you are in Plum Village you are safe. Every sight, every sound, every face, every touch should contain the dharma in it, and you are protected by the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

I know in America, in Europe, there are national parks where animals are protected. There are sanctuaries for animals, and you are not allowed to go in and shoot a deer or a rabbit. They are safe. So Plum Village is a kind of sanctuary like that where the Five Mindfulness Trainings are protected. If anyone shoots one of these precepts down, we have to tell him, to ask him, to leave, because we don't want the precepts shot down in our territory. We can do that only with the collaboration of everyone. The Five Mindfulness Trainings practiced by the whole sangha will transform this place into a sanctuary where everyone is safe. There is no sound, there is no sight, there is no touch that can create negative seeds in us. If we train ourselves well in Plum Village, we will go home and transform our home into a sanctuary also.

We use our television, we use our telephone, we use our kitchen in such a way that the mindfulness trainings can be kept alive all the time and we do that for the world, we do that for our family, we do that for ourselves. This is the teaching. So the lotus seed is here, in my two fingers, but it is there, in your heart, and you yourself are a wonderful seed and you should take care of yourself and we should be able to help you take care of yourself, so that one day you may sprout into a wonderful lotus pond, and you will make happiness for so many people. I think I have here enough lotus seed for each young person. Will you come

each of you and receive one lotus seed? Maybe you would like to keep it in your pebble meditation bag. I will ask only two persons to come and I will ask Sister Gina to take care of distributing to each one of you one seed. OK. A young gentleman and a young lady?

Please breathe in and breathe out.

[Pause for one minute while distributing seeds.]

[To the young people:] When you hear the small bell, stand up and bow to the sangha before you go out.

[Bell]

We have the habit of seeing things not inside of each other, but in Buddhist meditation we are advised to learn how to look at things, so that we can see things within each other. Usually we think that the lotus pond is outside of the lotus seed, and the lotus seed is outside of the lotus pond. But in fact, if we practice looking deeply, you realize that the lotus seed is in the lotus pond, but at the same time the lotus pond is in the lotus seed. When you look at your daddy, you may think that your daddy is outside you and you are outside your daddy. But if you look more closely, you will see that your daddy is not really outside. He is inside you, and you are inside your daddy.

When we were small, in the womb of our mother, there was a link between us and our mother called the umbilical cord. We were attached to our mother. We were a kind of one with our mother. Our mother breathed for us, ate for us, worried for us, drank for us, and smoked for us. [Laughter] So everything our mother did, we did because we were really one with our mother. When we were born, when we got out, they cut the umbilical cord and slowly we had the idea that our mother was different from us. But in fact, we continued to have that very close link with our mother. If our mother was not here, how could I be? So the umbilical cord, although you don't see it, still is there and we have to learn to look at the umbilical cord that is always there within us and our mother, and our grandmother, our grandfather, our ancestors.

You can touch it now. Since you are there, they are there, and they are not somewhere else. They are within you and you can touch them, because this hand is your hand, but of course it is also the hand of your mother. Remember when you had a fever as a child, you did not want to eat anything, drink anything, you suffered. And suddenly your mother came and put a hand on your forehead. You felt so good, and sometimes you wish that you still had that hand, that wonderful hand with you available at any time you suffer. But in fact, that hand is still available, because this is her hand. If you just breathe in and out and realize that this is also her hand, because your hand is a continuation of your mother's hand. You breathe in and you put it on your forehead, and then you have it again available. So the umbilical cord is always there, as ever.

And if you look more closely you will see that between you and a cloud floating in the sky there is also an umbilical cord, because without the cloud floating in the sky you would have no water in your body. And if you look at the sun, there is an umbilical cord linking you with the sun, because without the sun there would be light, no heat, no warmth, and no food, no washed vegetables. You can see that the sun is a kind of father, a kind of mother.

Driving through the countryside of France in the summer, I look at the cows, I look at the hay, I look at the nice fields. I feel closely connected. I see the hay as the milk, the yogurt I eat in the morning, also the cornfield. I see the link between everything. The cow is a mother to me.

You drink the milk from the cow, you have an umbilical cord between you and the cow, and the sunflower and the hay. To meditate means to train yourself to look in such a way, to see the nature of interconnectedness of everything. One day you will see that the idea of outside and inside are just ideas. Everything is inside. The one is the many. The British nuclear physicist David Bohm said that it seems that there are two kinds of order, the explicate order and the implicate order. These are two words invented by him. In the explicate order, everything seems to exist outside of everything else, like a flower is outside of the table, the flower is outside of the earth, is outside of the wind, of the cloud. Flower is not cloud, flower is not earth, flower is only flower. That is the way we used to look at things, and that world is called the explicate order. But if you look more deeply, you enter into the implicate order, where everything is in everything else.

In the teaching of the Buddha there are also two terms that are equivalent: *lokadhatu* and *dharmadhatu*. Lokadhatu is the world and dharmadhatu is also the world, but in lokadhatu it seems that everything is outside of everything else. You are not I, I am not you. You are not your father; your father is not you. But if you live deeply and you touch deeply, you will touch the dharmadhatu where everything is in everything else.

The Buddha's teachings on the interconnectedness of everything, of the nature of interbeing of everything, are found in a very beautiful way in a sutra called the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. The Avatamsaka Sutra is like a giant poem because it speaks in terms of image only. If you like poetry, you can enjoy the Avatamsaka Sutra and you can understand the Avatamsaka Sutra very easily. In the Avatamsaka Sutra you are invited to visit the dharmadhatu, the land of bliss, the land of no sorrow. If you don't mind being yourself, body and mind together, and making only one step you can enter in the dharmadatu, the kingdom of God. In the dharmadhatu there is a lot of light. That is why you can see things much more clearly. We need light in order for us not to be blinded by ignorance. Every being in the Avatamsaka world, in the dharmadhatu world, emits light from his or her body. When you enter that realm of bliss, you meet all kinds of people, animals, plants, and minerals, just like in this world. Imagine there are also businessmen, there are policemen, there are carpenters, there are teachers, there are students, there are little ones, there are old ones. We have every type of person in the Avatamsaka world, and each one of them emits light, the light of mindfulness. When they walk, when they sit, when they smile, they emit light, and you risk being struck by one beam emitted from them. And if you are struck by one light, you become mindful, and in turn you begin to emit light yourself. At first you step in and you are not very solid yet because you are not used to the dharmadhatu realm. But as you make three, four, five steps, you are struck by so many beams coming from everyone else, because when they walk, when they sit, when they smile, when they do things, they emit light, the light of mindfulness, and if you are struck by one beam of mindfulness, you yourself become mindful, and very soon you will emit light from your body. This you can do.

Think of Plum Village. When you step into Plum Village, you see everyone walking mindfully, sitting mindfully, speaking mindfully, and by doing so they emit the light of mindfulness. You realize that they are mindful and the beams of mindfulness strike you, and suddenly you become mindful, you stop running, and there you are walking mindfully, and in your turn you send out beams that will strike other people who just come and they become mindful themselves. That is why it is described in the Avatamsaka Sutra that in the dharmadhatu world there is a lot of light. Not only buddhas, bodhisattvas, great beings emit light from their body, from their consciousness, but everyone, including the policeman, including the schoolteacher, including the carpenter, including the mason, including the farmer, and yourself.

The Avatamsaka world is available in the here and the now. There is so much light. Light is available, you can profit from the light. You yourself produce light to help the Avatamsaka realm to be more beautiful. In the Avatamsaka realm there is a lot of space. Space inside of you and space outside of you. Because when you enter the Avatamsaka realm you lay down all your worries, your projects in the future, you know how to dwell in the present moment and enjoy the light, enjoy the space that is offered by the realm.

So much space, so much freedom. Freedom from worries, freedom from projects, freedom from the past, freedom from the futures, freedom even from the idea of how to be happy. There is so much space in the Avatamsaka realm. Everyone is free. Even the carpenter. He is not in a hurry. He does his job in a very relaxing way, singing. Building a house is a matter of a lifetime. After you build one house, you have to build another one. Why do you have to hurry? So carpenters are building houses in the most beautiful way possible. The houses are beautiful also, because they have been built in mindfulness, in concentration.

In the Avatamsaka realm, the cook, she cooks mindfully. She enjoys cooking, she enjoys washing the dishes. Every minute of the work brings her peace and joy. She does not need to run, to wish that the work would be over for her to be free. Her freedom is available while she is cooking. She is singing. She is looking at everyone else with the eyes of compassion. And she is emitting light, the light of freedom, the light of happiness, the light of mindfulness. She is happy because there is a lot of space within her. She has space to love. To embrace, because in her, blocks of worries, blocks of anxieties, blocks of fears have been let down. Because the light that has struck has helped her to lay down all this kind of luggage that is not very useful for her life or for her happiness. Look around her. A lot of space. No matter where she finds herself there is space. Hills, rivers, mountains, low lands, high lands are for her, she can enjoy every place. She feels like the moon traveling in empty sky. There is so much space around her.

The people who love her never want to lock her into a prison. Even the prison called love. The people who love her, the people around her allow her to be herself. And she allows people around her to be themselves, that is why all of them have space inside. And space outside. By loving each other, they offer each other space. They don't practice what we practice in the Lokadahtu: possessive love.

In the Avatamsaka world there is a lot of time. You never run out of time. Time is for being alive. Time is not for other things. We know how to use time, we know how to enjoy time. Because time is light itself. Time over there is not money. Time is life. And there is no deadline. And because there is no deadline there is no stress. Freedom is what we have in the Avatamsaka world. Freedom is available. In the Avatamsaka world there are a lot of flowers. Looking at everything, we recognize it as a flower. Your hand is a flower. I remember saying, "Quiesce Que c'est Que l'automne? L'automne est une saison ou chaque feuille est une fleur (What is Autumn? Autumn is a season in which each leaf is a flower.) But in the Avatamsaka you don't have to wait till Autumn to see each leaf as a flower. You can see it as a flower in Spring. And what is wonderful is that a new flower contains all the flowers in it.

In the Avatamsaka there are a lot of lion seats where you can sit and you can feel like a lion, the king of the jungle. You feel like you are the king of yourself, the king of the Universe, you are not a slave, you are powerful, you have sovereignty over yourself. Every seat where you sit becomes a lion seat. The foot of the bodhi tree. You don't have to travel to the foot of the bodhi tree. Every time you sit in mindfulness, that seat becomes the foot of the bodhi tree. And when you are in the Avatamsaka you know that the Buddha is available.



Where is Shakyamuni? You want to go there and pay a visit. In the Avatamsaka everything is in everything else. India is in Japan, Japan in America. You don't have to move. It's wonderful. You need to be yourself, mindful, and you can touch your root teacher anytime. You don't have to travel.

Suppose we hear the New York Times announcing that the Buddha will be available for a walking meditation at the foot of the Gridhrakuta mountain in India next month. And whoever wants to sign up for a walking meditation with Shakyamuni is requested to do so because very soon there will not be any place on the airplanes. You love your teacher so much and you want to be with him and walking up and down the Gridhrakuta Mountain. You pick up your telephone and make a reservation on the plane so that you can arrive a few days earlier, you want to be sure. When you arrive you may get worried, there are so many people, thousands and thousands of people are flocking into the area, and you don't think that you are strong enough to push, push, push, and get close to the Buddha. Very frustrating! Your deepest wish is that you can get close to him, one meter, or if possible, a little bit closer, and someone can take a picture of you with the Buddha. So that when you go home, you can show people, "You see, I was with the Buddha." But in spite of all these efforts, you are not sure to be able to meet the Buddha and to have a walking meditation with the Buddha.

But in the Avatamsaka world you don't have to buy any ticket, you don't have to make any reservation. You just practice mindful breathing in and out. And when you look you see the Gridhrakuta mountain is right there, and the Buddha is right there and you just take his hand and you just walk and enjoy it. You don't even need to take a picture with him, because you are him, you are in him, and he is in you. Why do you need a picture of yourself?

In Plum Village I always see that it is beautiful. And if I can be completely satisfied walking here, I don't need to go the Gridhrakuta Mountain. The Buddha is here, available anytime. I don't complain that the Buddha lived two thousand six hundred years ago. No, I don't complain. Because I can touch him, to take his hand, and to practice walking meditation anytime. I don't have the need to take a camera, to make a reservation, to push, to come closer to the Buddha. And I am confident that you who have received the teaching can do the same, stay where you are and be happy.

We need only to be ourselves and to look a little bit deeply, and we are in the Avatamsaka realm. We see ourselves in each other, we see the past, the future, are in the present, and the present is in the past and the future. We become unlimited. Birth and death will not be able to bother us anymore. Because we have unlimited space, unlimited time. We transcend all kinds of borders. We are one with everything else.

In the Avatamsaka world, we'll meet a young person whose name is Sudhana. Sudhana is the disciple of a very illustrious teacher, the Bodhisattva Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of great understanding. Sudhana is about thirteen or fourteen. He has practiced with his teacher, and his teacher taught him how to practice walking, sitting, and chanting. But his teacher is not a closed teacher. He said maybe my young disciple can learn with other teachers as well. So he urged his young student to go out and learn with other teachers. He does not say you are forbidden to study with another teacher. So there is Sudhana going out by himself and learned from many teachers. He got to know fifty-three teachers and learned a lot from all. Among these teachers, there are children, there are non-Buddhists, there are women, there are men, there are old people, there are young people. All kinds of teachers. He does not mind learning from anyone.

One day Sudhana met Mr. Love. His name is Maitreya, the future Buddha, who is supposed to be with us now, by this time, to continue the work of Shakyamuni Buddha. Maitreya Buddha

is supposed to be here with us, right now. *Maitri* means love, and Maitreya means Mr. Love. Maybe he is already here, but you don't recognize her. Because you have an idea of how a Buddha would look. Remove that idea, and you will meet Maitreya, Mr. Love, right here and right now. This teacher is always smiling, and so nice, so kind, so compassionate, so loving, that he takes the hand of Sudhana for a long walk, enjoying everything in the Avatamsaka world. And they come to a tower, a stupa, that is locked and Mr. Love says: "Dear young man, there are a lot of wonderful things within this tower. Would you like to go in and visit?" And Sudhana says, "Yes, why not?" Sudhana is very eager of learning, of seeing things, is very open. And you know, Sudhana is in yourself. And how to open the door of the Vairochana Tower? Vairochana is the name of the tower. Vairochana means the Buddha of the living Dharma.

Standing in front of the door, Mr. love practices breathing in and out, and knocks on the door, opens it, and sees that it is immense inside. A lot of space, only space. Suddenly there is no limit anymore, there is endless space, and inside there are trees, there are rivers, there are mountains, there are moons, there are galaxies. The Vairochana tower contains everything, and they enjoy visiting the mountains, rivers and galaxies in the Vairochana tower. Then they come to another tower, which is called Vairochana tower number two. And Mr. Love says, "Young man, do you want to go in and visit?" And he says why not? So they come to the tower, the door opens and there is endless space, endless time, countless galaxies, rivers and mountains, exactly like the first tower. And of course you know that inside there is another Vairochana tower, Vairochana tower number three. Look at this flower. It is like that. There is a flower within, and within that flower, there is another flower. Sudhana was so happy practicing with that teacher called Mr. Love.

Later, when they said good-bye, he met with another teacher who told him this: "You have to meet the mother of the Buddha because she is a wonderful teacher. Her name is Lady Mahamaya." "How can I meet her? Where should I go to have a chance to meet her?" And that teacher said, "You don't have to go anywhere, you just stay there, and if you know how to practice touching the earth, you'll see her."

You know, in Plum Village, we offer the practice of touching the earth. You come back to yourself entirely. You surrender yourself. You surrender your separate self. You become one with earth. And you use 100 per cent of yourself to touch the earth. And practicing like that seven days, suddenly Sudhana saw a huge lotus flower springing up from the earth. A lotus flower with one thousand petals. Right there in front of him. Suddenly he saw himself sitting on one of the petals of the lotus flower. It was wonderful. In no time at all, that petal of the lotus was transformed into a full lotus with one thousand petals. In one of the petals is the whole flower, with many petals, and in each petal of that second flower, there is also a whole flower. It is like the Vairochana palace. The lotus seed that I just offered to the child is like that. You can see in it the lotus pond, and in the lotus pond there is another seed, and if you look into the lotus, you will see another lotus pond, to infinity. That is not something abstract. You yourself are a lotus seed. You contain all the cosmos, all the ancestors, all generations of children and grandchildren. Take good care of yourself. Touch yourself deeply.

Sudhana saw himself sitting on a full lotus with one thousand petals, and he just looked up and he saw Lady Mahamaya sitting on another lotus, looking down at him, smiling with compassion and love. Sudhana bowed to her, "Lady, honorable lady, I had been looking for you." There is a conversation between the two persons recorded in a chapter of the Avatamsaka Sutra called "Entering the Inconceivable Realm." There is an English translation of the Avatamsaka available.

The conversation goes like this:

"Do you know something, young man? When I conceived Shidatta I was so happy. When Shidatta entered my womb, I was the happiest lady on earth. I felt that I had no more desire. I had a Buddha within me; what else do I want? I didn't have any other projects, I didn't have any other desires, and that is why I was so happy." A person without desire is a happy person because she has everything in her, the most valuable things in her. She doesn't have to run and to seek for them anymore.

Young man, do you know something? After Shidatta had gone into my womb, countless bodhisattvas, buddhas-to-be, came to me, and wanted to go in too, to see whether it was comfortable in there for their friend Shidatta. Countless bodhisattvas were there, and they wanted to get in, and before I could say anything, they all entered into my womb. And you know something, young man? If there were millions more who would have liked to go in, there was still space inside me."

That is the language of the Avatamsaka. The millions of bodhisattvas, if they want to go in and see whether Shidatta is comfortable in there, there is still plenty of space. In the Avatamsaka world there is a lot of space inside as well as outside.

"You know something, young man? I am the mother of all Buddhas in the past, I am the mother of all Buddhas in the present, and I am the mother of all Buddhas in the future. You should know that. You should train yourself to look at me and to see that."

Sudhana learned a lot. Not only did he see that Lady Mahamaya is the mother of all Buddhas, but he looked into himself and he saw that he is the father of all Buddhas of the past, of the future, and of the present moment. And in Avatamsaka, all of us are pregnant with a Buddha inside. Whether you are a gentleman or a lady, you are pregnant with a Buddha inside, and you are happy. You don't try to look for anything else because you know that Buddha-nature is within you. You know that the Kingdom of God is within you. The Kingdom of God, according to the Gospels, is like a grain, a seed, a mustard seed, exactly the same kind of language. The Kingdom of God is contained in a mustard seed. If you know how to do, to take care of the mustard seed, the mustard seed will become a tree, and all the birds in the cosmos can come and take refuge. The Kingdom of God is within you. The Buddha realm, the Avatamsaka realm, is within you. You need only to touch it. All generations of ancestors are within you: blood ancestors and spiritual ancestors. Why do you want to look for the Buddha, for Jesus, somewhere else? God is not the old man in the sky. God is alive in you. The Kingdom of God is also in you; just touch and make it manifest. We may need a little bit of training, like the children who need to know how to handle the lotus seed in order for the lotus seed to become a lotus pond. You need a little bit of training, that's all.

[Bell]

In the Lotus Sutra it is taught by the Buddha that everyone has the *Buddhata*, Buddha-nature within, and you are a Buddha. There is a baby Buddha waiting in you and you might lead your daily life in such a way to allow the Buddha in you to bloom, like a lotus seed, to become a lotus pond. Before this teaching, many disciples of the Buddha thought that the Buddha was the only one who could be a Buddha. The maximum you could be was a disciple of the Buddha, an arhat, someone who can transform entirely the afflictions and get free from all suffering, but that the Buddha was the only one who could be a Buddha.

According to the Lotus Sutra, everyone is a Buddha to be, and the Buddha is available within, you can touch anytime. A Buddha is not limited in time and in space. You don't have to go anywhere to touch a Buddha. You just stay where you are, and the Buddha is available. The

Buddha does not have to undergo birth and death. The Buddha is always alive, the living Buddha within. So don't think that the Buddha was born in Kapilavastu and entered mahaparnirvana in Kushinagara. That is only a manifested body of the Buddha. The true Buddha was not 2600 years ago only: the true Buddha you can touch in the here and the now. And while the Buddha was revealing the true nature of Buddha in everyone, suddenly there was a voice in space, calling "Wonderful, wonderful, Shakyamuni Buddha, you are preaching the Lotus Sutra to your assembly, wonderful, wonderful." And everyone looked up and saw a huge and beautiful stupa in the sky, decorated with all kinds of jewels, seven kinds of jewels. The very beautiful voice came from within the stupa, the tower, in the sky. Everyone was amazed. How could a stupa appear from the empty space like that, with a wonderful voice coming from within, and praising the Buddha Shakyamuni for giving that wonderful teaching about the Buddha nature. They turned toward their root teacher Shakyamuni Buddha, who was sitting on a rock on the Gridhrakuta Mountain in India, asking him with their eyes, and the Buddha smiled and said that is Prabhutaratna Buddha. He is sitting inside a stupa and he has been offering these words of praise for the Lotus Sutra. You know the Prabhutaratna Buddha has made a vow that everywhere in the cosmos, if there is a Buddha offering the teaching of the lotus about the nature of the Buddha he would come in the form of a stupa, and pronounce these words of praise. That is why today, since I am offering that wonderful teaching he is here to acknowledge it, and to praise me for offering you the teaching.

Everyone in the assembly wanted so badly to see the face of the Prabhutaratna Buddha; they look again at their root teacher and said, "how could we open the door of the stupa so that we could see the Prabhutaratna Buddha in person? We want to see him?" That's very human. All of us are like that: we want to see forms, to see the person who is praising our teacher. We love him because we love our teacher; therefore we love the one who is praising our teacher. That's very human.

The Buddha said, "It is not easy, my dear, because unless I can call back all my manifested bodies in the cosmos, I cannot open this door for eternity for you to see Prabhutaratna Buddha. You know something, you think I am the Buddha, I am the only Buddha, your teacher who is sitting here. In fact that is not true. I am everywhere, I am everywhere in the cosmos, and I am doing exactly the same thing as I do here. I have countless manifested bodies existing in every corner of the cosmos, and while I am teaching the Lotus Sutra here, countless manifested bodies of mine are offering at the same time the teaching on the lotus, and to open the door of the stupa, I have to summon, to call back all of my manifested bodies to be able to open this."

And everyone was looking at the Buddha pleading that he call back all his manifested bodies to be able to open the door for them to see with their own eyes the Buddha within. With a lot of compassion the Buddha wanted to do what seemed to be very difficult to do, for the love of his disciples he tried. He sent out a beam from his forehead, and that beam shot all around the cosmos, and suddenly they came. The assembly saw countless Shakyamuni Buddhas, they look like their teacher, they are coming from every direction, and suddenly space is filled with Shakyamuni Buddhas, countless of them. Now they realize that what they have thought to be their teacher is just a very small part of their teacher. Their teacher is not just a person of sixty kilograms sitting on the Gridhrakuta Mountain. The person of their teacher is huge, is the whole cosmos, existing everywhere in the whole cosmos. Now they have removed one idea of Buddha. They now begin to see their teacher in a different way. Their teacher cannot be just touched in time and space; their teacher has the kind of longevity that cannot be measured. Their teacher has the kind of presence that can be felt in every corner of the cosmos.

Then with all these manifested bodies, Shakyamuni made a gesture, and suddenly the door of the stupa opened. But still many people couldn't see it because everyone was sitting on the

ground. Only the heavenly beings, great bodhisattvas who stay up in the air, could look and see the Buddha in the stupa. But all of us are still there, grounded to the floor of the Gridhrakuta Mountain and they could not see, and they again look at their teacher and plead for help. You have to be on the same level in order to see. If you stay where you are you cannot see: you have to go up to the same level to see it. Otherwise, the Buddha will have to bring it down to you, or bring you up to it.

The Buddha is made of a lot of compassion, and that is why Shakyamuni Buddha tried to help. With his magical power he lifted the whole assembly up, and now everyone could see Prabhutaratna Buddha sitting in the tower. Suddenly Prabhutaratna Buddha smiled and made room in his seat, and invited Shakyamuni Buddha to come and sit together with him, and there the two Buddhas sitting together, the Buddha of eternity, and the Buddha of time and space, they were sitting together to show the assembly that there are two levels. The Buddha manifested as a sight, and the Buddha as your true nature, they are one, they are always one. You should not discriminate.

It's a wonderful sutra. It speaks with images. Prabhutaratna Buddha is the Buddha of the cosmos, and Shakyamuni Buddha is the Buddha of time and space, who appeared on earth for us as a teacher. Yet they are one. If you know to look deeply into Shakyamuni Buddha, you will see the Buddha of the cosmos, everywhere at any time, he is not limited to time and space, and therefore you don't have to go to the Gridhrakuta Mountain to meet him. You can stay right here, and he is available, because there are many manifested bodies of Shakyamuni in the world for you to see, to teach, to touch, and to learn from. If you know how to listen, the sound of the wind can be the teaching about the Four Noble Truths. If you know how to listen to the birds, the sound of the birds can be the teaching of the Eightfold Path. If you know how to contemplate the sunflowers, the sunflowers can reveal the Buddha-Land to you. It's right here, it's right now, the Buddha-Land, the Buddha, the Kingdom of God. You have to be alive to touch it, to live it. Don't waste your life running and looking somewhere else. It is right there.

If you know how to look, how to touch deeply, you will become birthless and deathless, because the nature of everything that is, is without birth and without death. You are in everything else, everything else is in you. Birth and death are just notions that scare us, and if you are able to remove the notions, you get the gift of nonfear, and only with nonfear can true happiness be possible.

In the Avatamsaka Sutra you read this gatha: "All things are birthless. All things have no extinction. You are also like that. If you know how to look at things this way, you can see and touch all Buddhas at any time." That is a four-line gatha in the Avatamsaka Sutra, in fact it is in the chapter on the Suyama Heaven.

There were so many bodhisattvas from the cosmos coming to the Gridhrakuta Mountain to listen to the dharma talk, and many of them offered to stay there to help the Buddha, because they see that the Buddha works very hard. This planet earth has so much suffering, and the Buddha has to take care of all the living beings on this planet earth. Although he has disciples who help him to take care of the people who need help, it does not seem that he has enough assistance to take care of the people. That is why countless bodhisattvas coming from every corner of the cosmos volunteered to stay to help the Buddha. The Buddha smiled and said, "Thank you. We have enough people here to do the work." So he pointed to the ground, and suddenly from the earth sprung up countless bodhisattvas. Everyone was beautiful, everyone was a dharma teacher, dharma teachers of every kind: young, less young, male, female, all of them are wonderful teachers, all of them are beautiful, and all of them bow to the Buddha. They all have been trained by the Buddha to be workers on this planet earth.

Shariputra asked the Buddha, "Dear teacher, you were born just forty or fifty years ago in Kapilavastu. How could you have had time to train so many dharma teachers, so many bodhisattvas to assist you?" The Buddha smiled and said, "Shariputra, you have seen me only in this life span. I am not limited in time. You have not seen me in my totality. You have only seen me as a manifested body. You have to touch the Buddha deeper to see that the longevity of the Buddha is infinite, and the presence of the Buddha is unlimited, and that is why I have been able to train countless bodhisattvas as dharma teachers. That is why I have thanked bodhisattvas coming from every corner of the cosmos, because here they have enough people to order to take care of the planet earth.

Every word, every sentence of the sutras reveal the same kind of truth, interbeing, the here and the now, the nature of connectedness of everything, everything is inside of everything else, the one contains the all, the all contains the one. If you are able to observe, to look deeply, and touch that kind of nature, you will become birthless and deathless, and you will be able to touch the Buddha at any time you want. Dear friends, we are going to practice walking meditation together this morning. Let's try to step into the dharmadhatu and become birthless and deathless. This is possible. Among us there are those who can stay longer in the dharmadhatu, and every time they hear the sound of the bell, they go back to the dharmadhatu. Those of us who have not been trained, we continue to stay and suffer in the lokadhatu, suffer because our view of separateness, or our lack of insight of interbeing. That is why the training is for us to break through, to know how to look at things in their interbeing nature, to touch the nature of no birth and no death. Happiness is available if you know how to step into the dharmadhatu, the Avatamsaka realm. In the Avatamsaka realm, there is a lot of light. Everyone is emitting light. There is a lot of space. You don't complain there is no space inside and outside. There is unlimited time. You don't complain that time is running out. There are a lot of flowers. Everything you look at can be transformed into a flower that contains all other kinds of flowers. There are a lot of comfortable lion seats. Wherever you sit may become a lion seat. A lion seat is a place where you can find stability, freedom, you don't want to run anymore, and the Avatamsaka realm is available here and now if you know how to step into it.

After the walking meditation, all of us are invited to join in the formal meal. In a three-month retreat, monks and nun used to have a formal meal every day. So we want to show you how we eat a formal meal in mindfulness. There is a little bit of chanting, an offering of the food to all Buddhas in the cosmos, there will be a sharing of the food for other living beings, and we eat in mindfulness so that peace and joy and brotherhood can be there. We inherit, we profit from the mindfulness coming from everyone in the assembly. Everyone is eating in such a way that the Avatamsaka realm is possible in the here and the now, and that is why when we put ourselves in that situation, it may be penetrated by a lot of light and happiness. We have reduced the ritual to the minimum so it will be pleasant for all of us.

Let us practice walking in such a way that with every step we can touch the Avatamsaka realm. I remember six years ago we had a June retreat for 21 days, and after the talk on the Avatamsaka, there was a very beautiful walk. There was some sunshine, the vegetation was beautiful and everyone felt very clearly that they were in it. Everyone was happy, everyone saw everything in a very different way, and I hope this will be possible today with the collective mindfulness and concentration of the sangha.

## Going to the Shore of Non-suffering.

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on August 13, 1997 in Plum Village, France.

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Good morning, my dear friends. Today is the thirteenth of August, 1997, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We still have one *paramita* to learn.

Paramita means perfection, the perfection of the crossing over to the other shore. We have seen that a paramita is not so difficult to practice; even children can do it. Paramita means from this shore of suffering we cross over to the other shore, the shore of well-being. From the shore of anger, we cross to the shore of non-anger. From the shore of jealousy, we cross over to the shore of non-jealousy. If you know how to do it, you can cross over to the other shore very quickly. It is a matter of training, it is a matter of practice, and you can do that with the help of another person or many other persons. It's nice to cross the stream of suffering together, hand in hand. So every time you want to cross, if you feel that alone it would be a little bit too difficult, you ask someone to hold your hand and you cross together the stream of suffering with him or with her.

If you feel you are caught in anger and that anger is a kind of fire burning you, you don't want that; you don't want to stay on this shore suffering from anger—you want to get relief, you want to cross to the other shore. You have to do something. Row your boat to go to the other side. Whether that is walking meditation, mindful breathing, or anything that you have learned here from Plum Village, it can be a boat helping you to cross over to the other shore. Next time when you feel that you don't like it on this shore, you have to make a determination to cross to the other shore. You may like to say to a person that you love that you don't want to stay here on this shore, you want to cross over to the other shore, and you may like to ask the other person to help you to cross. There are many things we can do together. Sitting and listening to the bell—we can do together, as two brothers, two sisters, as mother and child, or father and child. We can sit down and practice together.

I know a young mother who has a little boy of four years old, and every time the boy is agitated, not calm, not happy, she will take his hand and ask him to sit down and practice breathing in and out with her. She told her child to think of the abdomen, the belly, and breathing in seeing the belly expanding, rising, and breathing out seeing the belly falling. They practice breathing together like that three or four or five times, and they always feel better. If the mother left her baby alone to breathe, it would be a little bit difficult for him because he is so young, he cannot do it alone. That is why the mother sits next to him, and holds his hand, and promises to practice breathing in and out together. I have seen that, I have seen the mother and the child practicing in front of me. Because one day I had tea with them—the little boy wanted to have tea with me—so I offered him some tea, and we had a nice time together. Suddenly there was something, he became unhappy and agitated, so his mother asked him to practice that in front of me, and both did very well. So mother has to learn to practice with her child. Father also has to learn to practice with his child. This is a very good habit, a very good tradition, a husband has to learn to do it his wife, a partner has to learn to do it with her partner.

Every time there is one of us who is not happy, we have to help him, to help her, to go to the other shore. We have to support him, support her. We shall not say, “That is your problem,” no. There is no such thing as your problem; it is a problem for everyone. If one person suffers, then everyone around has to suffer too. If a father tells his son or his daughter, “That is your problem,” that means the father has not got the insight. There is no such thing as your problem, because you are my son, you are my daughter, and if you have a problem, that is our

problem, not yours only. Because if happiness is not an individual matter, suffering also is not an individual matter. You have to help and support each other to cross the river of suffering. So next time when you feel unhappy, you cry, you don't want to be unhappy, then you may like to ask your father, your mother, your brothers, and your sisters to help. "Please help. I don't want to stay on this shore. I want to cross over." Then they come and they will help you. He, she will help you.

You should know the practice. We should know how to practice walking meditation, to practice sitting and breathing in and out with our attention focused on our belly. We can invite the bell, to listen together. Every time you feel unhappy or angry, always you can practice listening to the bell. I guarantee that after having practiced three sounds of the bell, you will feel much better.

That is why it would be very helpful for each family to have a bell, a small bell, at least. I don't know whether they have small bells available in the shops, but I think that a bell is very useful. That is why children who come to Plum Village, they are always taught how to invite a bell. If we use a bell, then the whole family has to practice together. It's not possible that one person practices the bell and all the others talk and don't practice. We have to make an agreement within the family that every time there is a sound of the bell, everyone will have to stop—not only stop talking but stop thinking—and begin to breathe in and breathe out mindfully. Your breathing will become deeper, slower, and more harmonious after several seconds. You know you are crossing while you breathe in and out mindfully and listen to the bell. You are actually crossing the stream of suffering. Maybe in Chinatown you can find a bell somewhere, and I think that Plum Village has to arrange so that there are bells in the shop, so that everyone in the family can get one.

I propose that in each home, each family, there be a bell, and I propose that we arrange so that in each house there is one place to practice listening to the bell and breathing in and breathing out. In our house, there are rooms for everything. There is a room for guests, there is a room for playing, there is a room for eating, there is a room for sitting, for everything. Now, as a civilized family, we have to invent another room. I call it the breathing room. Or you might like to call it the practice room, or meditation room—a room that is for the restoration of peace, of joy, of stability. It is very important. You have a very beautiful room for television, and you don't have a room for your own peace, your own joy, your own stability. That's a pity. No matter how poor we are, we have to arrange so that we have a small place, a room in our family, to take refuge in every time we suffer. That room represents the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. When you step into that room, you are protected by mindfulness, by the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Children have to take care of that room. Because according to the practice, once they get into that room, no one can shout at them any more, including parents, because that is the territory of peace. You can take refuge in that, and no one can shout at you and chase after you any more. It is like the compound of an embassy. The compound of an embassy belongs to the territory of that country, and no one can invade that.

That is why in each home we should have such a room, very sacred. You should not use that room for other purposes. You should not go into that room to play chess, to play the radio, to do other things. That room is just for the practice of breathing, of listening to the bell, of sitting meditation, of listening to the dharma talks, dharma discussions. That room should be only for peace, for the restoration of peace and joy. When you know that there is someone in the room practicing, you should respect that, and not make a lot of noise. You know when you drive through a zone where there is a hospital, you know that many sick people are in the hospital and they need quiet—that is why you don't blow the horn, you don't make a lot of noise. The same thing is true when you know that there is someone in a meditation hall, in the



breathing room; you should try not to make noise in the house. If mother is in the meditation room, then you should turn off your phonograph or your television. This is a very good practice.

Every time you get angry, you get upset, you suffer, you know that you need the breathing room. So you think of the breathing room, and as soon as you begin to think of the breathing room, you feel already a little bit better; you know what to do. You don't accept to stay there without doing anything, just to be a victim of your anger, of your suffering. That is why you slowly stand up, you breathe in, breathe out mindfully, and you begin to walk in the direction of the breathing room. "Breathing in, I make one step, breathing out, I make one step." When people see you doing like that, they will have a lot of respect: "This person, although she is very young, she knows how to take care of her anger and her suffering." Everyone will be looking at you with respect, and they will stop laughing and talking loudly; they might follow their breathing to support you. That is the practice. Mother and father—who have received the teaching, who know what it is like to be in anger, who know how to practice when they get angry—mother and father will stop talking and breathe in and breathe out and follow you with their eyes, until you open the door and enter inside. Holding the knob of the door, you breathe in; pulling the door, you breathe out; and you go into it and you close the door behind you peacefully. You bow to the flower in the room—because it would be wonderful to keep one flower alive in that meditation hall, any kind of flower. That flower represents something fresh, beautiful, the Buddha inside of us.

You don't need a lot of things in that breathing room. You need only a pot of flowers—if you have a nice drawing of the Buddha, you can put that—otherwise, one pot of flowers, that will be enough. And one bell, one small bell. I trust that when you go home you will try your best to set up that important room within your home. And you bow to the flower, you just sit down. Maybe you have a cushion—a child should have his or her own cushion—and you need a cushion that fits you, where you can sit beautifully and with stability for five or ten minutes. Then you practice holding the bell in the palm of your hand, you practice breathing in, breathing out, as you have been instructed, and then you invite the bell, and you practice breathing in and breathing out. You practice listening to the bell and breathing in and out several times until your anger and your suffering are calmed down. If you enjoy it, you may like to stay there longer.

You are doing something very important—you are making the living Dharma present in your home. Because the living Dharma is not a Dharma talk. A Dharma talk may not be a living Dharma, but what you are doing—walking peacefully, breathing mindfully, crossing the river of anger—that is a real Dharma and you, it is you who are practicing, who are crossing, so you inspire a lot of respect. Even your parents have to respect you because you embody the Dharma, the living Dharma. And I will be very proud of you. If I see you, I will know that you are doing so.

I know of a family in Switzerland, a family of seven or eight brothers and sisters, a very big family, and they spent time in Plum Village, they learned about these things, and one day while they were home they got into a kind of dispute. Usually one month or two after coming back from Plum Village, you can still keep the atmosphere of peace alive. But beyond three months, you begin to lose your practice. You become less and less mindful, and you begin to quarrel with each other. So that day, everyone in the family was talking at the same time—all the brothers and sisters except one, the youngest. She suffered, she didn't know why all the brothers and sisters quarreled and suffered at the same time, so it was she who remembered that the bell is needed. So she stood up and reached for the bell, she breathed in and breathed out, and she invited the bell, and suddenly mindfulness came back. Everyone stopped shouting at once, everyone was breathing in and out, and after that everyone burst out

laughing, and laughing, and laughing, and made peace with each other. That was thanks to the youngest member of the family. I think she was five at that time. Now she is fourteen, and she is here now today.

[Bell]

If you are an adult, you can practice like that, like your child. Every time you get angry at your husband, at your wife, at your brother, or at your child, you can do like that. Instead of arguing and shouting, you stand up, you breathe in and out, and you practice walking meditation to your breathing room. Your child will see it, your husband, your wife, will see it. They will have respect for you, they know that you are able to handle your anger, to take care of yourself, to love yourself. They will stop what they have been doing, and they may begin to practice.

When you are in the breathing room, inviting the bell, listening to the bell deeply, and practicing breathing, one of your children may like to join you. So while breathing, you may hear the sound of the door opening smoothly. You know that someone in the family is joining you; that may be your child, that may be your husband or your wife. You feel much better that you are not practicing as an individual any longer, but you are practicing as a sangha. That will warm up your heart, as you feel that someone is sitting close to you and beginning to breathe in and breathe out—this is wonderful. Maybe the person—the person who made you angry—after a few moments, feels that he will have to join you in practice. Then you hear the door opening again, and there, he's coming and sitting close to you, and you are flanked by the two people you love the most in the world, practicing breathing in and out. There is no one to take a picture of all of you, but that is the most beautiful picture that could be taken of the family. Maybe you do not have any lipstick or powder on your face, you do not wear the best dress, but there you are in the most beautiful state of being, because all of you know how to practice. All of you embody the living Dharma at this moment. This is something we have to learn—this is a good habit, it's a good tradition, and you are truly the sons and the daughters of the Buddha.

I would like to transmit to the young people today something that they may use in the future. That is a cake. But this cake is not visible now. If it happens that your mother and your father get into a dispute—that happens from time to time—and you don't like these moments, the tension in the family, the disagreements between your father and your mother. The tension is coming up, one of them said something not very nice to the other, and you suffer. It is like the sky just before a storm. It is a heavy, oppressive atmosphere and a child always suffers in such a condition. I have been a child, and I did suffer when the atmosphere in the family was heavy and oppressive like that. But you know that you should not continue to be a victim because it's not healthy to stay long in such an atmosphere. You should do something. There are children who try to run away, but their apartment is too small and they are on the fifth floor. There is no garden around. So they could not get away.

Many children choose to go into the bathroom and lock the door to avoid the tension and heavy atmosphere in the family. Unfortunately, even in the bathroom the atmosphere was still felt. It's not healthy to be in such an atmosphere. Father and mother do not want to make their child suffer, but they cannot help it—they get into a tension, a conflict. In that moment, I would suggest that you do this: you pull the dress of your mother and you say, “Mommy, it seems that there is a cake in the refrigerator.” Just do that; this is another mantra that I am transmitting to you. Whether there is a cake or there is no cake in the refrigerator, you just open your mouth, after having breathed in and out three times, and you say, “Mommy, there is a cake in the refrigerator.” Just say that.

It may happen that there is a cake. Your mother will say, “That’s true. Why don’t you bring some chairs to the backyard? I will make some coffee and bring the cake down for you and for your daddy.” She will say that, and she will take the excuse to withdraw to the kitchen. Because she also wants to cross to the other shore; she doesn’t want to stay there forever and get destroyed. But if there is no pretext, it would be impolite, provocative, to just leave like that. So you help her. You say, “Mommy, it seems that there is a cake in the refrigerator,” and she will know, she is intelligent, she knows what you mean. You mean that you don’t want this to continue. Then when you hear your mother say this, you say “Yes!” and you run, you run away. You run to the backyard, you arrange some chairs and you clean the table back there. Your Mommy will go into the kitchen, she will boil some water for tea, she will ask you to come and help bring the cake to the backyard and so on. Both of you are doing these things and practicing mindful breathing together. It is very nice, and I will be very proud of you both. You know that you can do it. Please.

Then your father, left alone in the living room, he has seen that, and he has been in Plum Village, so he knows that his wife and his child are practicing. He feels ashamed if he doesn’t practice. So he stays there and practices breathing in and out also. He may join you in the backyard with the cake, and the three of you will be over to the other shore in just ten minutes. Don’t worry if there is no cake in the refrigerator because your mommy is very talented. She can always fix something.

So this is a cake that I want to transmit to you today, a cake that never disappears. This kind of cake is forever. This is one way of practicing paramita—crossing over. There are many Dharma doors. Dharma doors mean methods of practice. The breathing room is one Dharma door, a wonderful Dharma door. In the next century that’s coming in two years, I want to see in every home a breathing room, a sign of civilization. If you are a writer, if you are an artist, if you are a reporter, if you are a novelist, if you are a film maker, please help. If you are an educator, a Dharma teacher, please help. In every home, there will be a breathing room for us to take care of our nerves, of our peace, of our joy. We cannot be without a breathing room. So the breathing room is one Dharma door that we have to open to the new century, and the cake is also a Dharma door.

When you hear the bell, please stand up and bow to the sangha before you go out.

[Bell]

The last pebble, we call it *virya* paramita: the continued growth, the continued transformation. We know that when we cook potatoes, we have to keep the pot covered and should not take the lid off because the heat might get out. Also, we have to keep the fire on underneath. If we turn the fire off, then the potatoes could not cook. After five minutes, if we turn the fire out, then we cannot expect the potatoes to cook, even if we turn on the fire for another five minutes, and we turn it off. That is why there should be continued progress, continued practice, the continuation, the steady practice—that is called *virya*.

In terms of consciousness, we know that there are seeds to be watered and there are seeds to be transformed, and if we can continue to water the positive seeds and to refrain from watering the negative seeds, instead we know how to transform them—that is the process of continued transformation. Let us visualize our consciousness. This circle represents our consciousness, and the lower part is called “store consciousness” (*alayavijñāna*) and the upper part is called “mind consciousness” (*manovijñāna*). [Thay draws a diagram.] We know that in our store consciousness there are all kinds of seeds, positive and negative, buried here, and there are something like 51 categories of seeds. If it is a negative seed, the practice consists in preventing it from manifesting itself in the upper part of consciousness. You

recognize that there is a negative seed in you and you would not like it to be watered, because if it is watered then it will have a chance to manifest itself in the upper level of your consciousness and it will become a mental formation.

Suppose this is a seed of anger. As far as it accepts to stay still in the store consciousness, you can survive, you are fine, you can smile, you can be joyful, you can even be happy with the seed of anger in you, with the condition that it accepts to stay still. But if someone comes and waters it, touches it, or you yourself water it, then it will manifest itself on the level of mind consciousness. And there is a zone of energy called anger, and it makes the whole scenery unpleasant. It may stay here for some time, maybe for a few minutes, sometimes a half hour, sometimes the whole day, and the more it stays, the more you suffer. And the more it is here, manifested, the stronger it becomes at the base. So if you allow it to manifest, you get two disadvantages. The first is that you suffer up here, and the second is that it grows bigger here. That is why the practice of virya consists in not giving it a chance to manifest.

So if you love yourself, if you care for yourself, you have to arrange so that you will be protected, you will not touch it and water it, and you ask your friends not to water it. "My dear, if you really love me, don't water that negative seed in me. You know I have that weakness, I have that seed in me. If you water that seed in me, I will suffer and you will suffer too." So if we love each other, we should know each other, we should know the negative seeds in each other, and we should practice so that we do not water them every day. This is the practice of virya. We should plead with the people around us. "Dear people, you know me, you know my weakness, you know these seeds in me. So, please, if you love me, if you do care for me, please refrain, please do your best to protect me and not to touch, to water these seeds in me." We have to sign a peace treaty. We don't practice alone, we practice with a sangha, with the people we love, also.

If it has already manifested, then we should know the ways to embrace it and to help it go back as soon as possible to the store consciousness. Because the sooner it goes back, the better you can feel; because here you don't have to suffer long, and down here it doesn't have a chance to grow too big. That is the first meaning of virya. The negative should not be encouraged to manifest. And if it has manifested, do whatever you can to take care of it and to have it go back down here as soon as possible.

Third, the good seeds. Please do whatever you can in order for them to manifest as wholesome mental formations. If you know how to love yourself, to take care of yourself, then please look and realize that you have good seeds in you, seeds that have been transmitted by your ancestors, your teachers, your friends. You do whatever you can to allow them a chance to manifest. Because mind consciousness is like a living room, and you would like to invite into your living room only the pleasant people. With a beautiful pleasant person in your living room, you know it is very pleasant, you enjoy it. So don't allow your living room to be visited by unpleasant people. Invite only beautiful people, pleasant people to be there. That is the third practice of virya. You do that by yourself. You have all the seeds of happiness in here. You have a poem, you have a song, you have a thought, you have a practice, and every time you touch that, you invite it to the upper level of your consciousness and then you feel wonderful, and you keep it in your mind consciousness as long as possible.

Your mind is like a television set, or rather, it is like a computer with many hard disks down here. This is the screen of your computer, you can invite whatever you have down here up there. Selective invitation, that is your practice. You invite only the things that are pleasant. Sometimes the pleasant things are buried down here under many layers of unpleasant things, so you need to help, so that you can take these jewels up to the screen. Leave them up as long as you can, keep them as long as you can, in the upper level of your consciousness. A piece of

music, a poem, a happy souvenir, the seed of love, the seed of compassion, the seed of joy—all these positive seeds in you should be recognized and should be touched, should be invited. You ask the people around you, the ones who share your life, “Please my darling, please my friends, if you really love me, really want to help me, please recognize the positive seeds in me and please help these seeds to be touched, to be watered every day.” That is the practice of love. To love means to practice selective watering of the seeds within the other person and within yourself.

Whatever good, pleasant seed is manifested here, we try our best to keep it as long as we can. Why? Because if it stays long in here, at the base it will grow. This is the teaching in the *abhidharma*, the Buddhist psychology. Buddhist psychology speaks of consciousness in terms of seeds. *Bija* is a seed and we have all kinds of seeds within our store consciousness. Store consciousness is sometimes called the totality of the seeds (*savabijaka*). Seeds transform into mental formations. Unwholesome seeds are born here in the mind consciousness as unwholesome mental formations. Wholesome seeds are manifested as wholesome mental formations.

So take care of your living room. Take good care of the screen of your computer and do not allow the negative things to come up. And allow, invite, the positive things to come up and keep them as long as you can. There will be a transformation at the base if you know how to do it. This is the virya paramita: continued practice, continued growth, continued transformation—it should be the same.

[Bell]

Now we should go back to other paramitas. [Thay writes on board.] First is *dana* (giving). Second is *prajña* (insight). This is *shila* (precepts or mindfulness training). This is *dhyana* (meditation), consisting of stopping and looking deeply. And this is *ksanti*, translated in Plum Village as inclusiveness. If you only participated in one of the four weeks in Plum Village, you may like to listen to other dharma talks in order to understand, to have a clearer and deeper understanding of the other five paramitas. We have been showing the nature of interbeing between the six paramitas. If you practice one of the paramitas deeply, you practice all six. You cannot understand one paramita unless you understand all the other five.

So continued practice here means that you continue to practice giving; you continue to practice the mindfulness trainings, you continue to practice inclusiveness (embracing whatever there is), continue to practice stopping, calming, and looking deeply. And you continue to practice understanding. All five are the contents of the sixth. And this is true of all of the paramitas. We have used *dana* paramita as an example, because understanding is a gift, a great gift. To be able to stop, to calm, and to look deeply is a great gift. To continue your practice is a great gift. To practice embracing everything, including what you may think to be unpleasant in the beginning, that is also a gift. Living according to the five mindfulness trainings is also a great gift. So you cannot practice giving unless you practice the five other paramitas. And this can be applied with all the paramitas, the interbeing of the six paramitas.

In the beginning, I told the children that you don’t need money at all to practice *dana*. You offer your freshness, you offer your presence, you offer your stability, your solidity, your freedom. That’s a lot already. And these things can be cultivated by the practice of the other paramitas.

All the six paramitas have the power to carry us over to the other shore so that we will not suffer anymore. After some time, training yourself, you’ll arrive at the state of being when you can cross the stream of suffering very easily and very quickly. You have to master the

practice, and you are no longer afraid. It is like knowing how to make tofu. If you know that there is no longer any tofu in the house, you are not afraid. A few hours and then you have tofu again. You know how to garden, to practice organic gardening. You know that there are heaps of garbage in your garden. You are not afraid because you know how to transform the garbage back into compost, and you are not afraid at all. While transforming the garbage into the compost, you can be very joyful. Therefore, we are no longer afraid of the garbage in us, the afflictions, the suffering in us. We know how to handle them, how to transform them; therefore, crossing to the other shore is a joy. You don't have to suffer even while crossing. You don't think that only when you arrive at the other shore you stop suffering, no. Crossing is already a pleasure.

It's like a child, when she knows that there is a breathing room, she stands up, and she practices walking meditation to the breathing room, and she already feels better because she knows the way, she knows what to do. So if you train yourself in the six paramitas, they will become a habit, a tradition, a routine; and every time you want to cross, you just cross, and not making a lot of effort, you just cross. It's like how you walk, you practice walking meditation. And you will not suffer any setbacks. You train yourself until you arrive at the state of being called the state of no setbacks, always progressing, not backsliding. That is the meaning of virya. You have mastered the techniques, the ways. That is why you never go back to the state of utmost suffering in which you were caught before.

Life is a continuation of transformation; it's just like gardening. You cannot expect that your garden will only produce flowers—your garden does produce garbage. That is the meaning of life. Those who suffer don't know the art of transformation—that is why they suffer, because of the garbage in them—they don't know how to transform. But you, you know the art of transformation; that is why you can embrace even your suffering, and you are able to transform. You never get back to the state of being overwhelmed, not knowing what to do with your suffering. If you train yourself in the six paramitas, one day you will feel that you are no longer afraid of any suffering. It's like doing the dishes. Of course, every day you have to use dishes, you have to eat, and therefore you produce dirty dishes. But for us, making dishes clean is very easy. We have detergent, we have water, we have soap, we have the time, we know how to breathe in, breathe out, how to sing while doing the dishes. So doing the dishes is no longer a problem. It can be very joyful. So you don't suffer a setback any more, just because you know the way, you know the paramitas, you have the boats to cross over to the shore.

In the bell there are a few questions that I have not answered. The newest questions that I have are these two. “Thay, why don't I feel that I love myself? I am unable to love myself.” That is one question. And the other question is: “Without anger, without hate, how could I have the energy to work for social justice? How could you really love your enemy? If you love your enemy, what kind of energy is left for you to step up your struggle. If you accept your enemies as they are and then you do nothing?” So these two questions, I think they are linked to each other. And I think that the elements of the answers to these questions have already been offered in the Dharma talks. But we need to work with ourselves, we have to practice mindful breathing, mindful walking, looking deeply, and recognize all the seeds in order to see the true nature of interbeing, then we could understand the real answers to these questions—not only as theory, but also as practice.

“Why don't I love myself? Why is it so difficult for me to love myself?” The question can be answered by yourself, if you look into what you call “love,” what you call “self.” You have an idea of love, an idea of self, that is very vague. If you look deeply into what you call love, if you look deeply into what you call self, then you will not feel that way anymore. Self is made

of what? Of non-self elements. Looking into yourself deeply, you can see all the non-self elements within you.

When I look into my store consciousness, I see the seed of hate, the seed of fear, the seed of jealousy, but I also can see the seed of generosity, the seed of compassion, the seed of understanding. So these seeds must be opposing each other, fighting each other within me, like good and evil fighting, the angel and the beast. They are always fighting within me. How could I have peace at all? It seems that you have something in you that you are not ready to accept. There is a judge in you, that is a seed, and there is a criminal that is being judged in you, and both are not working together in you. So there is a deep division in you, a deep sense of duality within yourself, and that is why you feel that you are alienated from yourself. You cannot love yourself, you cannot accept yourself. But if you know how to look at things in the light of interbeing, you know that everything is linked to everything else and the garbage can always serve as the food for the growth of the flower.

The other day I said that while walking in the Upper Hamlet, enjoying so much the flowers, the vegetation, the beauty, I came to a place where I saw there was some excrement left by a dog or something like that. I told the children I did not mind because I have a great trust in the earth. Earth is great, earth has a big power of transformation, and I know that earth will be able to transform the dirty things into nutritive elements soon for the vegetation. So I still continued to smile, and I didn't mind at all. I saw the interbeing nature of the two things, the flower and the excrement. Looking in one, I saw the other.

The same thing is true with garbage and flower, afflictions and compassion and happiness. All mental formations in us are of an organic nature. If we know how to take care, to embrace, we will be able to transform and we will make the afflictions into the kind of nutriment that will grow, that will help my wisdom, my understanding, my love, my compassion, to grow. If you have that kind of insight into yourself, that both garbage and flowers inter-are, you would be able to accept the negative things in you in the way an organic gardener would be able to accept the garbage in her garden, because she knows that she needs the garbage in order to nourish her flowers. You are no longer caught in the dualistic view, you suffer much less.

Then when you look back, look deeply into your so-called self, you see that your self is made of non-self elements. What you don't like in you, you are not responsible for alone. Your society, your parents, your ancestors are equally responsible. They have transmitted those seeds to you because they have not had a chance to recognize them. They did not have a chance to learn how to transform them, that is why they have transmitted them to you. Now you have an opportunity to recognize them, to learn ways to transform them, and you take the vow to transform them for your sake and for the sake of your ancestors, your parents, your society. That is the vow of a great being, of a bodhisattva.

So if you understand things like that, you will not say, "Why don't I love myself?" It is possible to love yourself. The way offered in Plum Village is very concrete, how to love yourself. Your self, first of all, is made of your body. You love yourself by the way you eat, you drink, you rest, you relax. You don't love yourself because you don't practice these things, you don't allow your body to rest. You force your body to consume the things that destroy it. So how to love your body, it is written down very clearly in the teaching of Plum Village: mindfully eating, mindfully consuming, mindfully allowing your body to rest and to restore itself. When we come to Plum Village, we have to learn these things. Sometimes you don't love yourself, you destroy yourself, and yet you don't know. The Buddha said that there are people who think that they are the lovers of themselves, but in fact they are enemies of themselves. They are doing harmful things to themselves, they are destroying themselves, and yet they think that they are loving themselves. They destroy themselves with their lack of

mindfulness in eating, in drinking, in dealing with their body, with their feelings, with their consciousness.

When you have a feeling—pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral—do you know how to recognize it? Do you know how to embrace it? To calm it? That is the process of loving. When you come to Plum Village, you have to learn these methods of recognizing, accepting, calming, and transforming. To love means to practice—to practice looking, seeing, understanding, and transforming. When you love yourself like that, you love other people also. You love your ancestors, you love your parents, you love your children and their children, and you love us all by taking good care of yourself and loving yourself. Because you are made of us. Your self is made of non-self elements, including ancestors, clouds, sky, river, forest, and us.

You may say, “I want to love myself, but I don't feel that I can love myself.” If you understand the teaching, if you can look into yourself and the nature of love, you see that love is a process of practice. Unless you practice, according to the teaching, you are not loving yourself at all, and not loving yourself, you cannot love anyone. Because self-love is at the same time the love for others. The moment when you know how to breathe in mindfully and smile, you make yourself feel better and you make the person in front of you, behind you, feel better also.

As far as hate is concerned, it is the same. You say that there is a lot of social injustice and other people are doing evil things to destroy themselves, to destroy you, to destroy the world, and it feels good to be angry at them. But who are they, who are you? You feel that you have to do something to help the world, to help society, but who is the world, who is the society?

When you see delinquent children, caught in drugs, in violence, and locked up in prisons, do you think that you should hate them or you should love them? You should take care of them. Why do they behave like that? Why do they look for drugs? Why do they have recourse to violence? Why do they oppose their parents, their society? There must be reasons why they do so. One day they may kill you, they may use a gun and shoot you down, they may burn your car. Of course, you can get angry at them, you can fight them, and if you have a gun you might like to shoot them down before they shoot you. But that doesn't prevent them from being the victims of society, of their education, of their ancestors, because they have not been well taken care of. Punishing them would not help them; there must be another way to help them. Killing them would not help them.

There was a sea pirate who raped a small girl of twelve years old on a refugee boat. Her father tried to intervene, and they threw her father into the ocean and he drowned. After the girl was raped, she was so ashamed, she suffered so much—also because of the death of her father—she jumped into the ocean and drowned.

That kind of tragedy took place almost every day when there were boat people. There was not a day when we did not receive news like that in the office of the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation in Paris during the war. I remember the morning when I read the report about that girl, I did not eat my breakfast, I went into the woods. I practiced walking meditation, embracing the trees, and so on. Because I felt I was being raped and I was one with that child. I was angry at first. But I knew that I had to take good care of myself, because if I let the anger overwhelm me, make me paralyzed, then I could not go on with the work I should do, the work of peace and taking care of the victims of the war. Because at that time, at the office of the Buddhist Peace Delegation in Paris, we took care of providing the delegations in the peace talks with real information, trying to stop the war, and trying to relieve the suffering of war victims, including orphans and so on. At that time we were able to get support for more than 8,000 war orphans to continue to live and to go to school. So we could not afford to be



paralyzed by such news that came every day into the office, so we had to practice together. Without mindful breathing, mindful walking, and renewing ourselves, how could we go on with our work when we were flooded with information like that about the war?

That night in sitting meditation, I saw myself born in a fishing village along the coast of Thailand, because I was meditating on the sea pirate. I saw myself as born in the family of a poor fisherman, and my father was very poor. My mother also was very poor. Poverty had been there for many generations. My father got drunk every night because the work was so hard and he earned so little, and he beat me every time he got drunk. My mother did not know to read and to write, did not know how to raise a child, and I became a delinquent child, playing with other delinquent children in the village along the coast of Thailand. At the age of 12, I already followed my father to the sea to help him with the fishing. I had seen girls and boys who were dressed in beautiful dress, who went to school in their beautiful automobiles, and I felt that I would never enjoy that kind of life at all.

Now I am a fisherman on my own. I have my fishing boat, and yesterday someone told me that the refugees very often bring with them some gold, and if I just go and take that gold just one time, I will be able to get out of this kind of chronic poverty and that will give me a chance to live like other people. So without understanding, without compassion, just with that kind of aspiration, I agreed to go with him as a sea pirate. When out in the sea I saw the other pirates robbing and raping the girl, I felt these negative seeds in me also come up very strong—there is no policeman around, there is freedom, you can do everything you like here, nobody sees you—so I became a sea pirate, and I raped the twelve-year-old girl, and she jumped into the river. Nobody knows. I have some gold now.

If you are there on the boat and if you have a gun, you can shoot me, I will die. Yes, I will die and that is the end of my life. You shoot me, yes; you can prevent me from raping the girl, yes; but you cannot help me. No one has helped me since the time I was born until I became a 18-year-old fisherman. No one has tried to help me—no educator, no politician, no one has done anything to help me. My family has been locked in the situation of chronic poverty for many hundreds of years. I died, but you did not help me.

In my meditation, I saw the sea pirate. And I saw also that that night along the coast of Thailand, 200-300 babies were born to poor fishermen. I saw very clearly that if no one tried to help them, then in 18 years many of them would become sea pirates. If you were born into the situation of that sea pirate, if I were born into the situation of that pirate, then you and I could become sea pirates in 18 years. So when I was able to see that, compassion began to spring up in my heart, and suddenly I accepted the sea pirate.

You have to do something to help them, otherwise they will become sea pirates. Shooting them is okay, but it does not solve the problem. Locking up the people who use drugs and who do violence is okay, but that is not the best thing to do. There are better things to do. There are things you can do to prevent them from being what they are now, and that is the work of love. In the enemy, you can see the beloved one. That does not mean that I would allow them to continue the crime, the violence, to destroy. I would do whatever I could to prevent them from causing harm, but that does not prevent me from loving them. Compassion is another kind of energy.

You say that anger is a formidable source of energy that pushes you to act. But anger prevents you from being clear in mind, from being clear sighted. Anger cannot give you lucidity, and in anger you can do many wrong things. As parents, we should not teach our children when we are angry. Teaching our children when we are angry is not the best time. It does not mean that we should not teach them, but we teach them only when we are no longer angry. We don't

teach with the energy of anger, we teach only with the energy of love, of compassion. That is true with the sea pirates, with the people who are destroying life. We have to act, but we should not use the energy of anger as fuel. We have to use the energy of sacrifice, the energy of compassion.

Great beings like the Buddha or Jesus Christ, they know the power of compassion, of love. And there are people among us who are ready to suffer, to die, for love. Please don't underestimate the power of compassion, of love. With the energy of compassion in you, you continue to remain lucid and understanding is there. When understanding is there, you will not make a mistake. You are motivated by love, but love is born from understanding.

[Bell]

Many of us are motivated by the desire to do something for social change, for restoring social justice. But many of us get frustrated after a period of time because we don't know how to take care of ourselves. We think that the evil is only in the other side, but we know that the evil is within us. Craving, anger, delusion, jealousy—they are in us. If we don't know how to take care of them, to reduce their importance, to help the positive qualities in us grow, we would not be able to continue our work, and we'll be discouraged very soon, overwhelmed by despair. There are many groups of young people who are strongly motivated by the desire for social action, but because they don't know how to take good care of themselves, they don't know how to live and work with harmony among themselves, they give up the struggle after some time.

That is why it is very important that we take good care of ourselves, and then learn to look at the other people not only as criminals but also as victims. Of course, we should do everything we can to stop them in the course of their destruction. But we should also see that they are to be helped at the same time. We should be able to make it very clear to them that, "If you do this, we will try to stop you by whatever means we feel that we need, but we will do it with love and compassion. We will try to stop you, to prevent you from doing whatever you try to do to us and to your victims, but that does not mean that we are acting with hatred or anger. No, we do that with love. If you know how to go in that direction, we will support you wholeheartedly because it is our desire, our hope, that you move in the direction of harmony, of nondiscrimination, of social equality."

We have to make it very clear, because in that person there is a friend, and there is an enemy in him or in her at the same time. The enemy is the negative seeds, and the friend is the positive seeds. We should not kill the friend in him, we should only kill the enemy in him; and to kill the enemy in him is to recognize the negative seed in him and try to transform it, to not allow the situation to be favorable for the continuation of crime and destruction.

So that is a strategy, because to practice you need a strategy. You need a lot of intelligence, of deep looking, and you also need a lot of compassion and love. In the context of social change, we have to practice together. We have to unite our insights. We have to bring our compassion and insight together in order to succeed. We know that only love, only compassion and understanding, can really bring a change, because hatred cannot be removed by hatred. This is something said by the Buddha in the *Dhammapada*, hatred can never be removed by hatred.

[Bell]

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 16, 1997 in Plum Village, France.

***Taking Good Care of Our Habit Energies***

Dear friends,

Welcome to the Summer Opening in Plum Village. Who is three years old? Who is less than three years old? I would like to introduce to you Bao-tich who is four years old. He just celebrated his birthday two days ago. Here is Bao-tich. This is his second year in Plum Village to practice. Can you turn around? He came last year and he practiced very well. He was so happy, so this year he came again. Bao-tich is his name. It means the store of jewels. I am very happy that he is here. He has a great time being in Plum Village. He came about ten days ago and I had the opportunity to drink tea with him and to play with him. I am very happy when I am surrounded by young people. They look like flowers to me, very fresh, very innocent, and I wish that the young people will stay with us for the whole retreat, thirty days.

This year we will also practice pebble meditation, but instead of having five pebbles we have six. Each person may like to make a small bag like this. You are free to choose the color you like. I also have a bag of this color and inside I keep six pebbles. They are all here, six pebbles, one, two, three, four, five, six. In the other bag I have also six. They are bigger, like this. After having picked them up outside, I used soap to wash them carefully, and I dry them. Then I put them into a bag like this. I think today you may like to make your own pebble bag. You go and pick up six beautiful pebbles, you wash them, you dry them, and you put them in your small bag, to practice pebble meditation. I think the grown-up people, if they want, they are welcome to do the same, pebble meditation. We will give a name to each pebble, a specific name to the pebble, and you may like to inscribe the name on each pebble also. Because this summer we are going to learn about the practice of the six *paramitas*, the six ways of crossing over to the other shore. There is this shore of the river and there is the other shore of the river. When you are unhappy, you are on this shore, and you don't want to stay on this shore, you want to cross over to the other shore, the shore of happiness. When you are not peaceful, you are agitated; you are on this shore. You don't want to stay on this shore; it's not very pleasant to be agitated, so you want to cross over to the other shore, the shore of peace.

Suppose you are overwhelmed with anger and hatred. You don't like it because anger and hatred make you suffer. You don't want to stay there on the shore of anger and hatred, the shore of suffering, so you would like to cross over to the other shore, the shore of nonhatred, of compassion, of love. We are going to learn together how to practice this kind of crossing. Don't believe that we need many years or months to cross to the other shore. Sometimes we need only a few minutes, or even a few seconds, to cross from one shore to the other shore. The six *paramitas* will be represented by the six pebbles. Each pebble will bear the name of one *paramita*. *Paramita* means crossing over to the other shore.

I'd like to teach you how to practice with the bell, because it is very important to practice with the bell, very pleasant also. There are all sorts of bells, and this is about the smallest kind of bell. This bell also has a cushion to sit on. This is a mini-bell. If you look at the bell, you see that it has also a cushion under it. So a practitioner may like to learn how to invite the bell to sound, because when we hear the sound of the bell we can also cross to the other shore. When you are angry, when you are sad, when you are agitated you are on this shore, but if you hear the sound of the bell, and if you know how to practice listening to the bell, then very quickly you can overcome your anger, your agitation. You cross over to the other shore, and suddenly you feel peaceful and happy. You need only to listen to the bell and breathe in and out a few

times to find yourself on the other shore, the shore of peace, which is more pleasant. Every one of us can learn, it is very easy.

You may like to keep the bell on its cushion like this in order to invite the bell to sound. We don't say hitting the bell, because that word is not nice, or striking the bell. But we say invite the bell to sound. "Bell, my dear bell, may I invite you to sound." That's very nice. The bell becomes a kind of friend. So with your left hand you hold the bell like this and with your right hand you hold the bell inviter. You may call it a stick, but here we call it the bell inviter. And we say "the bell is invited" or "you invite the bell."

There are many of us who don't need the cushion. We put the bell directly on the palm of our hand, and by doing so we notice the sound will be more beautiful. You ask why? Because when we put the bell on the cushion, quite a large surface of the bell is touched by the cushion. The sound is all right, but if you put it without the cushion, the sound will be better. Suppose I hold the bell like this. The bell is not very free, that is why the sound of the bell isn't beautiful. See:

[Bell]

When the bell is free, the sound of the bell will be more beautiful. That is why in Plum Village, we like to put the bell like this on our hand in order for the bell to be as free as possible. When we invite the bell the sound will be beautiful. Before you invite the bell to sound, you have to bow to the bell first. Why do we have to bow to the bell? Maybe people will say that it's strange, why is this person bowing to a bell? It's queer. You may just look at the bell and say "Hello bell," that's all right too. Bowing to the bell is a way of greeting a bell. You can greet the bell with a smile. You can greet the bell with a few words: "Hello there, my little bell, my darling little bell." You can greet the bell in several ways. There are people who would like to greet the bell by bowing like this, so it's up to you to choose. So when you hold the stick, the bell inviter, you have to practice breathing in and breathing out three times, so that you become a real bell master. A real bell master is someone who is concentrated. The body and the mind together, and that is our practice. So even before we invite the bell to sound, we become already calmer and happier. You may like to breathe in and pay attention to your in-breath and breathe out and pay attention to your out-breath. You breathe in and breathe out like that three times. Now you have become concentrated, you have become a bell master. When you know that you are a bell master, you can begin to invite the bell.

I think today everyone has to practice, no matter how young you are. We should learn how to invite the bell. This is very important. To invite the bell you have to wake the bell up, like this. [Muffled bell] This is the waking up sound. Why do we have to wake the sound of the bell up first? Because we don't want the bell to be caught by surprise. We don't want the people around us to be caught by surprise. We want to warn people that a big sound of the bell will be heard. That is why we begin by waking up the bell like this. [Muffled bell] Everyone knows that they will hear a real sound of the bell in just a few seconds. So you prepare people. You give people the opportunity to stop thinking, to stop talking, to prepare themselves for receiving the sound of the bell. So you allow them about five or six seconds, or even more like this. [Muffled a bell] Then you invite the bell.

[Bell]

So we distinguish between the two sounds, the first is the waking up sound, and the second is the full sound, remember? To produce the waking up sound you have to keep the inviter like this. [Muffled bell] You don't take it off, like this. [Bell] You breathe in. Everyone knows that a full sound is going to be heard, so everyone stops thinking and begins to smile to receive the

sound of the bell. When the full sound is heard, you practice breathing in and you recite a short poem.

“I listen, I listen,” that’s when you breathe in. And when you breathe out, “This wonder sound brings me back to my true home.” My true home is in here, where I can find peace and stability and joy. So we have to learn by heart this short poem:

Listen, listen,  
This wonderful sound brings me back to my true home

“Listen, listen,” that is for your in-breath. “This wonderful sound brings me back to my true home,” that is for your out-breath. You breathe in and breathe out three times like that before you invite the second sound. Everyone in the hall will be practicing with you, and enjoying breathing in, breathing out and listening to the bell. After having practice three sounds like that, you become much better, you are calmer, you are more stable, you are more joyful. That is the practice of calming.

I think I am going to lend you this bell, the young people, and you have time to practice this morning and this afternoon, also. I have a few. I would recommend that before you practice inviting the bell, you look at the bell, you bow to the bell, and you say “Hello bell.” You pick it up and you put in on your left hand like this. You raise your hand to the level of your eyes. This is a very beautiful movement. You look at the bell like that. You breathe in, breathe out, and you smile three times. You know in Plum Village we have a beautiful poem to recite silently when we look at the bell and breathe in and breathe out. This poem is like this:

Body, speech and mind in perfect oneness  
I send my heart along with the sound of this bell.  
May the hearers awaken from forgetfulness  
And transcend the path of anxiety and sorrow.

All of us know it by heart. The poem is available in Vietnamese, in French, in English, in German, and so on. You can learn it. Every time I breathe I read silently one line and when I breathe out I read the second line and so on. I repeat:

Body, speech and mind in perfect oneness  
I send my heart along with the sound of this bell.  
May the hearers awaken from forgetfulness  
And transcend the path of anxiety and sorrow.

After you have breathed in and out like that you become calm, you become a bell master. You can begin to invite the bell. Shall we try to practice together? You will breathe and I will read the *gatha*, the poem for you.

Body, speech and mind in perfect oneness  
I send my heart along with the sound of this bell.  
May the hearers awaken from forgetfulness  
And transcend the path of anxiety and sorrow.

Now I am waking up the bell. [Muffled bell]. Now I am inviting the bell.

[Bell]

Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Now I invite the second sound.

[Bell]

Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Now I invite the third sound.

[Bell]

Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home.

I have completed three sounds and I have breathed in and breathed out nine times. I slowly lower the bell and I put it on the cushion. I bow to it again. I have accomplished the task of being your bell master. This is for the small bell, for the big bell it is a little bit different, but we will learn later.

What is the purpose of practicing the bell? Practicing the bell is one of the ways to help us cross to the other shore. When you are angry, when you are unhappy, when you are agitated, you don't like to be on the shore of anger, agitation and unhappiness. So you invite the bell to bring your body and your mind together, to get still, to get calm, to get peaceful. And while you practice breathing in and out and listening to the bell, you are crossing the river of suffering. You go to the other shore, the shore of peace and of happiness.

It is my hope that in every home we have a bell, so that you can practice crossing to the other shore together as a family. In Plum Village we practice also when we hear the telephone ringing. If you observe, you see that every time the telephone rings, the brothers and sisters in Plum Village practice breathing in and out, calming and smiling exactly like when they hear the bell. So the telephone sound becomes a kind of bell for us. We also practice with other sounds as well. When the clock, every hour or every quarter of the hour, plays the music, the monks, the nuns, and other people in Plum Village, they stop talking, they stop thinking and they go back to their breathing. They practice mindful breathing, and they feel calm, they feel happy. They are close to the shore of happiness and peace. I think there will be brothers and sisters that will help you to learn how to practice the bell today. I hope that after tomorrow you will be able to do it. This is the end of the dharma talk for young people. When you hear the bell please stand up and bow to the sangha before you go out and learn more about the practice.

[Bell]

My dear friends, we have several kinds of energies within ourselves. There are positive energies that we should cultivate, and there are negative energies that we should be able to transform. We have habits. We have good habits and we have bad habits, and the practice of Buddhist meditation is to recognize our habits, in the form of energies, and to transform them or nourish them. When you hear the telephone ring, or when you hear the sound of the bell, if you have the habit of the practice, you need no one to remind you. You just stop you thinking and enjoy breathing in and out. This is a good habit. In Plum Village all of us have that good habit. Every time we hear the bell. Every time we hear the clock playing the music, or the telephone ringing, we always naturally go back to our breathing, and we enjoy our in-breath

and out-breath and smile. We don't make any effort because it has become a habit, a good habit. We learn to do it in a way that makes the moment pleasant.

There is no point of practicing if it is not pleasant. The practice should be pleasant. This is very important. When you practice listening to the bell, the practice should be pleasant and nourishing. Otherwise, why should we practice? The same is true with the practice of sitting, walking, eating in silence, and so on. There are many people who practice sitting meditation, walking meditation, sharing a silent meal, but not everyone enjoys the practice.

If you don't enjoy your practice, it means you are not doing it the way you should do it. The question is not to practice or not to practice. The question is to practice in such a way that you get the healing, the transformation, and the joy of the practice. In our tradition the practice of meditation is seen as a source of nourishment. So it is very important that we make the practice pleasant, joyful and nourishing. If while sitting you suffer, then you should know that your way of sitting is not correct. If you are sharing a silent meal and you don't feel happy, it means that your way of eating is not correct. Something has to be corrected in your way of practicing, your way of looking at the practice, your way of conducting the practice. We have brothers and sisters around, we can always consult them and ask them for their experiences. They will show you. Many of us have been in the practice for a long time and we can help you to practice with more joy. We have to practice with intelligence.

[Bell]

Suppose we have the habit of walking very quickly, very fast. Suddenly, when we arrive at Plum Village, we are requested to slow down. We feel it is not pleasant. Since everyone is walking slowly, you have to slow down and you don't feel happy. So your practice is a cause for your suffering. Walk slowly, yes, but walk in such a way that it makes you happy, relaxed and calm, that is the point. We have to ask how to walk slowly and yet not to suffer and to enjoy the walking. So it requires some understanding, some insight, some practice, to enjoy walking meditation.

You are facing a kind of habit, the habit of walking very quickly, running. That habit is rooted very deeply in our daily life. Maybe our ancestors used to walk very quickly and they have transmitted to us that way of walking. Perhaps many generations of people have believed that happiness is somewhere there in the future. We have to go there in order to be happy. Happiness is not possible right now, right here. That kind of belief, conscious or unconscious, has become very strong in us. We believe happiness is impossible here and now. That is why there is a kind of energy pushing us to run, to run all our life, searching for a time, a place, when happiness is possible.

So we understand why we get caught in that kind of habit, always running. We are determined to stop, to transform that habit, and we learn how to make steps that can allow us to touch life deeply in each moment. With that kind of learning and practice we will be able to walk more slowly and we will begin to enjoy touching the earth with our feet, combining our steps with our in-breath and out-breath. We just feel wonderful to walk like that, walking without any intention of arriving. That is new for us. We have to learn to develop the new habit. And as we get the energy of the new habit, we will enjoy walking.

So the practice is to recognize the old habit, the negative habit, the bad habit, to recognize the energy of our habits and smile to them. And also to cultivate the new habit, the good habit, until the new habit begins to produce energy. When we have the new kind of energy, we don't have to make any effort, we just enjoy listening to the bell, we just enjoy walking slowly, we

just enjoy eating in silence, because we like it. We get the nourishment, the joy, of doing so. Suddenly, the practice becomes pleasant, joyful, nourishing.

It would be absurd if we followed a practice that makes us suffer. The Buddha always reminds us his Dharma, his practice, is pleasant in the beginning, in the middle, at the end. So the practice should be lovely, should be pleasant, should be joyful, whether you are sitting or walking or eating or drinking. Whether you are cooking or cleaning. Cooking and cleaning should be done in such a way that it can provide you with peace and joy and nourishment.

We know how strong, how powerful is the habit energy. We notice that there are times when we are not ourselves. We cannot be ourselves. We are carried away by our habit energy. We did not want to say that, we knew that saying that would create damage in our relationship with the other person. But finally, we said it. We knew that we should not do it. We knew that if we went ahead and did it we would create damage in our relationship. But finally, we did it. We said it was stronger than us. What is stronger? The habit energy. So we felt helpless, powerless. We felt very weak that we cannot cope with it. It is so strong, our habit energy. And after having said it, after having done it, we regret it. We feel sorry. We condemn ourselves. Sometimes we make a strong vow that next time we will not do it again. We will not say it again. But next time, we do it again, we say it again. The habit energy is very strong. That is why we have to be able to practice, to learn ways of handling that habit energy in order to transform it.

The Buddha did not recommend fighting against your habit energy. He recommended the practice of recognizing these habits. The practice of recognizing, if we take it up in our daily practice, will become another kind of habit, a good habit. You are able to recognize everything that is happening within yourself, including the habit energy that you consider to be stronger than you. Recognizing like that does not mean that you have to suffer because you have that habit, because that habit may not have been learned during your lifetime. It may be a kind of habit energy transmitted by several generations of your ancestors and you just received it. You have to recognize that it is there and try to transform it for yourself, for your parents, and for your ancestors.

About ten years ago I toured in several states of India to offer retreats and Dharma talks to the communities of the Ambedkar society consisting of the former untouchables. A friend there helped arrange my tour. One day I was sitting with him in a bus. I was enjoying very much the landscape outside. I was very happy to be in India, to offer retreats and Dharma talks and to enjoy the people and landscape there. When I looked over at him, he was sitting on my right, he was not relaxed. He was very tight. He had the habit energy to worry too much. I knew that he was trying his best to make my trip pleasant, so I told him, "My dear friend, I know you are trying very hard to make my visit pleasant, but I would like to tell you that I am very happy right now, it is very pleasant to sit here, I enjoy it very much, why don't you sit back and enjoy yourself, also. There is nothing to worry about now." He said, "OK" and he sat back. I continued to enjoy the palm trees and other things outside and just a few minutes later I turned around and looked and he was just like before, very tight, very rigid.

I know it is not easy. When you belong to a caste discriminated against for four thousand, five thousand years, you have to struggle day and night. The habit to struggle day and night was there deep in him. It had been transmitted by several generations of ancestors. There he is with his strong habit energy, struggling day and night, not being able to relax for a second, for a minute. Of course we can help him to relax, to understand that there is nothing to worry about, that it is possible for us to enjoy life in the present moment. He is perfectly capable of understanding this and practicing this, but it does not last. Just for a few seconds and he allows himself to be caught again by that very strong habit energy. So there is no point of



blaming yourself because you have that habit energy. You know that that habit energy is not something you created for yourself, it has been transmitted. You recognize your ancestors who have suffered. You know that now you have an opportunity to transform that energy for yourself, for your ancestors, and for your children and their children.

Also about ten years ago there was a young gentleman who came from North America to the Upper Hamlet for the practice and he stayed two, three weeks in the Upper Hamlet, very happy. He was surrounded by brothers and sisters who always practiced walking meditation, sitting meditation, working in the kitchen with mindfulness, and so on. One day he was asked by friends to go to the market in St. Foy La Grande to do some shopping, because it was Thanksgiving Day and everyone was asked to make a dish, to cook something special of their country, to offer to our ancestors. The Chinese would cook a Chinese dish, the Dutch would offer a Dutch plate, and so on. He was making something with the other Americans so he went to St. Foy La Grande and shopped.

While shopping he noticed that he became agitated, that he was getting in a hurried mood. He was surprised, because during his three-week stay in Plum Village he never behaved like that. He was surrounded by the sangha, he was always mindful and peaceful. The energy of the sangha helped him stay mindful and peaceful, but here he was alone. Suddenly without the sangha around that old habit energy emerged. Because he had practiced for three weeks already, he also had another kind of energy, the energy of mindfulness. He was able to recognize the coming up of the old habit. He also saw that he inherited that habit from his mother, because his mother was always like that, always in a hurry. So he breathed in and he said, "Hello Mommy." Suddenly the habit energy was no longer there. When you recognize it, that energy will lose its power over you. It will go back into the depth of your consciousness, into your body, waiting for appropriate circumstances to manifest again. He just breathed in and said, "Hello Mommy" recognizing the habit as it was. "My mother is always like that." So he was free from the habit during the practice of breathing in and breathing out. He knew that without the sangha around he was still weak and he tried to follow his breathing mindfully. He finished his shopping and came back and told us the story.

You can recognize the habit energy because you have the energy of mindfulness, a kind of energy within you that does the work of recognition. Mindfulness is the energy that can recognize what is there in the present moment. When you drink, you know that you are drinking. When you breathe in and you know that you are breathing in, the energy of mindfulness is there. We call it mindfulness of breathing -- Anapanasati. When you walk, and you know that you are walking, mindfulness is there. It is called mindfulness of walking. When you eat and you know that you are eating, that you are chewing, then mindfulness is there, we call it mindfulness of eating.

We try to be mindful in every act we do, in every moment of our daily life, and that is the best way to cultivate the second kind of energy, the energy of mindfulness.

If you practice walking mindfully, breathing mindfully, sitting mindfully, doing things mindfully, you cultivate the kind of energy called mindfulness. Only with that energy can you recognize the old habits and prevent them from pushing you to do things that you don't want to do. To say things that you don't want to say. So cultivating the energy of mindfulness is the heart of our practice. That is why our friends are requested to practice walking mindfully, breathing mindfully, and eating mindfully. From your tent to the meditation hall, you are requested to walk mindfully. Every step must be mindful. You may like to coordinate your steps with your in-breath. When you breathe in, you know you are breathing in, mindfulness of breathing. When you make a step, you know that you are making a step, mindfulness of walking. You can combine the two. Breathing in you make two steps or three steps, breathing out you make two steps or three steps. You don't need to arrive in the meditation hall to

practice meditation. You begin already from your tent. And you may begin even before that. When you hear the bell announcing sitting meditation, the sound brings you back to your true home, already. Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home. There you are in your tent, but you are already in the meditation hall. Every one of us in our tent, in our room, we are listening to the bell. We are practicing breathing in calmly, breathing out smiling. We are practicing together as a sangha. After having practiced with the bell, we begin to walk in the direction of the meditation hall. Everyone is doing it at the same time, so the meditation hall is everywhere, should be everywhere, even in private, in the shower room.

If you practice like that one week, two weeks, three weeks, you'll be like our friend going to the market of St. Foy La Grande, shopping and having the capacity to recognize the habit energy when it emerges. Recognize it as it is, smile to it, and do not fight it, you don't need to fight it. You don't need to feel ashamed of it. It's like when you do the work of gardening. There are fresh vegetables, there are flowers, but there is also garbage. We know that vegetables or garbage, they are all organic. Flowers sometime have to turn themselves into garbage. And garbage, if you know how to take care of it, will be transformed into flowers again. Both flowers and garbage are organic matter. We don't discriminate against the garbage, because we know that with the garbage we can make flowers again. So the bad habits, the negative energies in us, you don't have to throw them away. You may like to make use of them to feed your good habits.

So the practice of meditation does not mean that you draw a line of discrimination between the positive energy, what you call goodness, and the negative energy, what you call evil. That is not the way. That is discrimination. That is not the insight that you should use. The insight is interbeing. You look at both as organic. This is because that is. That is because this is. So with the garbage you can make the flowers and the flowers are to become garbage later on. The process of gardening is the process of continued transformation. We recognize the flowers in us; we recognize also the garbage in us. We do not have to discriminate. If it is a flower, we recognize it as a flower. "Hello, flower." If it is a piece of garbage, we say "Hello garbage." No discrimination. No fear. The only thing is to learn how to practice gardening. You are an organic gardener. You know how to take care of your bad habit energies, to transform them into the good ones. We don't imagine that after having eliminated all the negative things we only have the positive things, because the positives feed on the negative and vice versa. So that is the insight of nonduality. It is so important in the teaching of Buddhist meditation. The insight of interbeing: garbage and flowers inter-are.

So when you have learned how to accept the negative things in you, you already have peace. I don't mind that there are negative things in me. I accept them. I have learned a way to take care of my negative things. I also have learned a way to take care of my positive things, to keep them alive longer. I have learned how to transform the negative things, in order to nourish the positive things. All of that can be done only if you have the energy of mindfulness. That is why our practice here is to learn how to eat mindfully and joyfully, how to walk mindfully and joyfully, how to breathe mindfully and joyfully. The "mindfully" should go together with the "joyfully." While sitting together and eating in silence there are a number of people who are very happy, just to sit there and share a meal with the sangha. It can make many people very happy. Because eating is a very deep practice, it's like when you practice sitting, or walking, or washing your clothes. Your practice may be very deep if the energy of mindfulness is strong during the practice.

[Bell]

We know what the negative habit energies have done to us and our beloved ones. We know that we have to take good care of our habit energies and to transform them. That is why we

are determined to cultivate the energy of mindfulness in order to recognize that habit energy every time it tries to come up. This is very important. Therefore, during the time together here we do everything with the purpose of cultivating that energy. That is why we don't spend our time talking a lot, or thinking a lot, or reading a lot, or studying a lot. We use our time here in order to just practice mindfulness. Mindfulness everywhere, mindfulness every time. Walking, we only walk mindfully. Eating, we only eat mindfully. We try to do everything mindfully, because we want to have enough of that energy to be able to recognize our habit energy. Because we know that once we are able to recognize the habit energy, the habit energy will not overwhelm us again. Every time the habit energy is recognized it will lose some of its strength. And the next time when it comes up again we do the recognition again. That is the only way to diminish its power. By doing so we use that energy to feed the new habit energy, the positive habit energy.

We should be able to recognize that around us there are refreshing, beautiful, and healing things, and inside us there are refreshing, healing and wonderful things. The wonders of life are everywhere, within us and around us. Cultivating the habit of recognizing them, touching them is very important. The sky may be very blue, very clear, and very beautiful, but if you are caught in your sorrow, caught in your anger, you cannot touch the blue sky. The children are fresh, lovely, but you have no capacity of being with them, of recognizing them as the miracles around us. We imprison ourselves in our sorrows, our worries, our fears. We are not capable of touching the beauties, the wonders of life around us, and even inside of us. So we have to practice to learn the new habit of touching these wonders of life.

To be alive, to be still alive, is a miracle. To be able to walk with other people on this beautiful planet, it's a wonderful thing. Remember when you were very sick, unable to breathe, you could not enjoy your breathing. You had a fever, and you had no strength to go out of your room. Your strength had left you. Your desire was to be able to get up and to go into the garden and just walk in the garden, but you could not do it. So having strong feet, being able to walk, having eyes still in good condition that allow us to contemplate the sky, the clouds, the luxurious vegetation, to look at the people, the children -- it's a wonderful thing. But we had that bad energy, that negative energy, of neglecting these kinds of things; we only tried to focus on our suffering, our problems. So we had to learn to cultivate that new energy, to recognize and to touch the positive things. Because we need the nourishment, the healing. If we cannot touch the healing and refreshing elements around us and in us, we cannot get the healing and nourishment. Therefore cultivating the energy of mindfulness to recognize what is there, wonderful, refreshing, healing, is very important.

A pebble, a cloud, a flower, all are wonderful, all are mysteries. It would be a pity if we cannot be with a leaf, with a flower, with a cloud, with a stream of water, only imprison ourselves in our sorrow and fear. So recognizing the habit energy, recognizing our fear, our sorrow. Yes, that is our practice. But to recognize the sky as it is, to recognize the fact that you are alive, that you are walking, that there are living beings around you, that you have eyes that can look at things, you have fingers that can touch things, is equally important. The practice is simple and you have the sangha around you. Everyone is trying to do the same, living each moment of our daily life deeply, trying to dwell in, to establish ourselves in the present moment. Not to run, because running is a strong habit energy, running to the future, or running to the past. That is why the Buddha made it clear that the past is already gone and the future is not yet there. There is only one moment when life is available; that is the present moment. Your appointment with life is in the present moment. If you are not able to touch the present moment, you miss your appointment with life. All these things are very simple, and not difficult to understand at all. Therefore, all our energies and time should be used to put it into practice. Let us together practice mindfulness in our daily life. Let us learn how to go back to the present moment, to live deeply every moment of our daily life. Because in that present

moment you will find the most beautiful things, what we are looking for: peace, joy, stability love, the kingdom of God, the pure land. All these things can be touched and found only in the present moment.

So learning how to go back to the present moment and to live deeply in that moment is the kind of new habit energy that you have to cultivate, and as a sangha we do it together. You are requested to practice listening to the bell, but when there is no bell you may like to practice listening to the birds, mindfully. Because every sound can help you go back to the present moment and to practice. Every sight, also, can serve as a mindfulness bell. When you see a brother, a sister walking mindfully, a monk or a nun walking mindfully, that is another mindfulness bell, you go back to yourself, you enjoy breathing in breathing out, you touch yourself, you touch life, you touch the world deeply in that moment. To meditate means to be alive, to live deeply that moment. That is why we practice Noble Silence. When we wake we begin to walk, begin to arrange things in mindfulness, we follow our breathing, we listen to the bell mindfully, we go to the meditation hall mindfully, we enjoy the minutes of sitting, of walking, of chanting mindfully, we enjoy our breakfast mindfully. Everything is for practice. Eating your breakfast is the practice.

Allow yourself to be penetrated by the collective energy of the sangha. Offer your energy of mindfulness to the sangha. When you practice mindful breathing and walking you emit the energy of mindfulness from you. And everyone is practicing and emitting the energy of mindfulness. That is why being in sangha we can allow ourselves to be penetrated by that kind of energy of mindfulness. It will be transforming and healing to us. So we receive the energy of the sangha and we participate and contribute to that collective energy. That is why practicing in a sangha is much more pleasant and easier than when you practice alone. Practicing together, walking, breathing, sitting, doing things, we offer each other the energy of mindfulness.

After the retreat we can continue to cultivate that energy at home. We may like to set up a sangha in your area to continue your practice. Because according to this practice the energy of mindfulness is the only kind of energy that can help change our life. Bring back the joy of life, bring back love, understanding, and transform the old habit energies that have been causing us and the people we love a lot of suffering. In dharma discussions let us not be theoretical, let us be very practical, let us exchange the experiences of our practice: how to dwell firmly in the present moment and how to live deeply each moment of our life. How to encounter life deeply in order for us to look deeply and get the kind of insights that will be able to liberate us from our anger, our fear and our suffering.

After this dharma talk we shall gather outside for a short walking meditation and we will gather around the big bell tower for some chanting.

[Bell]

## **We are the Continuation of our Ancestors**

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 21, 1997 in Plum Village, France.

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Good morning my dear friends.

Today is the twenty-first of July 1997. We are in the Upper Hamlet. I have a picture of me as a baby monk I want to share, to show you, especially the young people. I was seventeen. And then I have a picture of mine when I was sixteen. You see the difference after one year of practice. I have to tell you that I was a novice practicing with other novices and I had a great time. I was a very happy novice. I think it is very important to be happy when you are a novice because if you are happy as a novice, you will be happy as a monk. So you might like to pass it around and look closely at the baby monk. Maybe we'll have to print several copies for the children.

A few years ago there was a reporter. He is of American origin, but he lives in Denmark. He is a film maker, also. He came to my hut and interviewed me with his big, huge camera. One of the questions he asked is this, "Thay, if today the Buddha and Jesus met on the street, what do you think they would tell each other?" And this is my answer. "There is no if, because they are meeting each other every day. They are telling each other many things. Because you don't look deeply, you don't listen deeply, that is why you have not seen them meeting every day and exchanging every day." I said that because in my mind it is clear that the Buddha is here and Jesus is also here.

We are the continuation of the Buddha and of Jesus. The son is always the continuation of the father. Everyone has to agree upon this fact. Scientist or nonscientist, theologian or nontheologian, they have to accept the fact that the son, the daughter, is the continuation of the father. and also the mother. In fact, they are the father and the mother. So it is absurd to say, "I don't want to have anything to do with my father."

There are people who get angry with their father and make the declaration, "I don't want to have anything to do with him." That would be impossible, because he, whether he wants or not, he is the continuation of his father. He is his father. That is why the only thing for him to do is to practice reconciliation within. Because his father is within him, there is no way of getting rid of his father. There are people who are angry with their mother, and they feel the same. They want to forget her. They don't want to have anything to do with her. Is that possible? No. They are the continuation of their mothers. They are their mothers. They cannot escape. That is why the practice is to go back and to reconcile with the mother within and with the father within.

We have blood parents, we have blood ancestors; but we have also our spiritual parents, our spiritual ancestors. The Buddha is my spiritual ancestor. I was born from him. I am his continuation. I am him. Later on in life I have adopted Jesus as another spiritual ancestor. In me they are alive. I do not have any conflict with them as I do not have any conflict with my blood parents and ancestors. This is a very important practice.

I am the Buddha and you are the Christ, because I am the continuation of the Buddha and you are the continuation of Jesus Christ. And we are seeing each other every day and we are talking with each other every day. And, it's silly to say, "If today the Buddha and the Christ met each other, what would they say to each other?" They have to meet each other. They have to say things to each other every day, because that is also for the sake of peace. If people of

different religious affiliations do not see each other, do not meet each other, do not talk to each other, then peace will not be possible. So, I told the reporter that they are meeting every day and I wish them success.

Now, children, let's listen to this. You might wonder whether the Buddha is a person or where he is, because in the drawings you make and give to me you like to draw the Buddha. Where is the Buddha now? How can we touch him, see him and talk to him? Is he a he or maybe a she? Is there one Buddha only, or are there many Buddhas? These are very interesting questions and you have to ask yourself and to ask your friends.

There is a Buddha whose name is Shakyamuni, and I have adopted him as a teacher, but I know that besides him there are many other Buddhas. And there are part time Buddhas, there are full time Buddhas. We have to get rid of the idea that the Buddha is a god. No, the Buddha is not a god. The Buddha may be a human being like you and I. But the Buddha may be a deer or a squirrel. Because anyone, anything that is animated by Buddha nature can be described as Buddha. Buddha nature, what is it? Buddha nature in Sanskrit is *Buddhata*. Buddha nature is inherent in every one of us, not only humans, but nonhumans as well.

I'd like to tell you about the Buddha nature that is in us. It is like electricity. I believe that electricity is. There is such a thing as electricity because I have seen electricity manifested in many forms. In the dark, you turn on the light and you have light. That is a manifestation of electricity, right? It is very hot, and you turn on the fan, and you have the wind. Well, that wind is made by electricity, so electricity is seen in the form of the wind. And when you open your refrigerator to take some ice cream, you see that the cold in there, the capacity to retain the cold, to keep your ice cream not melting, that is also electricity. When you drive your car, if the car can run like that it means electricity is there. There is something that can help generate electricity and that electricity can propel your car or your airplane.

I know that electricity exists because I have seen light, I have seen the wind, I have seen the cold, I have seen the force driving the car. You cannot say that electricity is just the light, or electricity is just the wind. No. So, Buddhahood, Buddha nature, can be seen in a person like Shakyamuni but Buddha nature can be seen in other forms. You yourself, you have the Buddha nature in you. If you know how to touch it, if you know how to nurture it, then the Buddha nature will manifest in you and you have more peace, more joy, more stability, more freshness. That is why to practice meditation is to touch the Buddha nature in you and to help it manifest so that you feel much better. That is why I have offered you the practice of pebble meditation.

Yesterday I talked about what you can give. First of all, I said the most precious thing you can give to the people you love is your true presence. In order to be truly present, you have only to breathe in and breathe out and become fresh like a flower. And you go to her, go to him, the person you love, and say, "Darling, I'm really here for you." This is a gift. I also said that you have to offer your freshness. In order to be fresh, you know what to do. Relax, breathe in, breathe out, smile. Put down your worry, your anger, and you become fresh. That is something you can offer to people you love.

There is a young practitioner among us and his name is Bao-tich and he is four years old, or four years young. He just celebrated his fourth birthday a few days ago and he has a very nice practice. Every time he gets agitated, his mother invites him to sit like a Buddha. My dear little boy, it does not seem that the Buddha nature in you is so evident. So, would you like to sit down in the lotus position and practice breathing and smiling so that the Buddha will come back into your heart? And Bao-tich always listens to his mother, and practices sitting down. He sits very beautifully and after a few minutes, he says, "Mommy, touch me to see whether

the Buddha is already clear.” And his mother will touch him and say, “It begins to be clear, so continue sitting for another minute.” So after Bao-tich has become still and serene and peaceful, his mother will touch him again and say, “Now the Buddha in you is very clear, so go and play, my darling.” So Bao-tich is very glad and runs and plays again. He is there. He promised that next year he will speak English.

I would like you to practice the same. You may recuperate the Buddha nature in you very quickly. We have made a song for you to practice. “Flower - Fresh. Mountain - Solid. Water - Reflecting. Space - Free.” You need only to use four of your pebbles—one pebble for Flower; one pebble for Mountain; one pebble for Water; and one pebble for Space. This can be practiced with music.

Suppose this is the pebble for Flower. You put it on the palm of your hand and you practice breathing in, breathing out three times with the flower in mind. “Breathing in, I see myself as a flower.” You do it in such a way that you become a real flower. It is not difficult: if you want to be a flower, you will be a flower. Relax. Smile. Smile with your eyes. Smile with your mouth. Smile with your ears. Smile with your body. You can do it. “Breathing in, I see myself as a flower.” In fact, we are all flowers. Human beings are a kind of flower. If you don’t look exactly like a flower it is because you have not taken good care of yourself, you have cried too much, you have dried yourself up. You have allowed sorrow and worry to enter you and destroy you. So, recuperate. Restore your floweriness. This is one of the ways to do it. “Breathing in, I see myself as a flower.” This is not imagination. You are a flower. You have the right to recuperate your floweriness.

There are many of us when we grow old—sixty, seventy, eighty—we are able to retain our floweriness. Congratulations to you who are able to do so. I have seen people eighty, ninety, still very fresh. We have to admire these people. We have to follow their example. We have to learn from them how to retain our floweriness. “Breathing in, I see myself as a flower. Breathing out, I feel fresh. You know, a flower does not seem to do anything, but without flowers, life would seem very sad. So you don’t have to do anything. If you can be a flower, you serve the world. “Breathing out I feel fresh.” You do that three times, you pick up the pebble and you put it on your right.

Now you pick up another pebble. This pebble’s name is Mountain. You know that stability is very important. A stable child, a stable adult, can inspire people and make them happy. Stability is very important. The image of the mountain can help you to practice. “Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain.” Nothing can assault me. If you have a stable position for your body, if you know how to sit erect; if you know how to enjoy your in-breath and out-breath, and become the master of yourself, then any provocation, any sorrow, anything you imagine cannot shake you. So you stay solid like a mountain.

“Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain. Breathing out, I feel solid.” Solid as a mountain, that is our practice. You learn to be solid in your sitting position and then you will learn to be solid in your way of walking. You will be solid in your way of driving. You will be a solid driver. When you cook your dinner, you can practice your solidity, also. Three times. “Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain. Breathing out, I feel solid.” And you put aside the second pebble.

Now you pick up the third pebble. The name of the third pebble in this practice is Still Water. Not just water, still water. There are times when you look at the water you see it very still. So still you can see the blue sky and the white clouds in it. You can see the trees reflected in it, exactly like up there. If you have a camera, you just aim at the surface of the lake and take the picture. When you develop it people might think that you took it from up there because the

image is so faithful. So when your mind is calm, still like that water, you will reflect everything as it is. You don't distort things. You don't have wrong perceptions, because wrong perceptions make you angry, make you suffer.

The Buddha said wrong perceptions are the ground of all our suffering. The other person does not want to destroy us but we still think that she is trying to destroy us. The other person is not trying to make us suffer, but we believe that his intention is to punish us. When we see a piece of rope in the twilight, we might think that it is a snake, but it is not a snake. In the twilight, you are walking and suddenly you see a snake. You scream and you run away. When your friend brings in a torch, you realize that it is not a snake at all. It is only a piece of rope. That is what we call a wrong perception. A wrong perception always makes us suffer and that is why we have to learn to see things as they are and not distort them. It is very important to practice being calm like still water because still water can reflect things as they are. Breathing in, I see myself as still water. Breathing out, I reflect things as they truly are.

Lastly, freedom, space. "Breathing in, I see myself as space. Breathing out, I feel free." People who have space within don't suffer. People who have space around them, they don't suffer. It's like the moon. Look at the moon traveling in the empty sky. It has a lot of space around it. The moon is serene, happy. But we, sometimes, we don't have space inside. We are full of worries, of anger, of fear, of projects, of desire. We don't allow ourselves to have space inside, and there is no space outside at all. We don't feel that we have the time. We don't feel that we have space to move around. What kind of life are we having? When we love someone, we love in such a way that we no longer have any time, any space and we deprive the person we love of space and time, and love becomes a prison for us and for the other person. That is not true love. If you love someone and if that someone isn't capable of moving any more, that's not love. So space is a very big gift. You have to offer him space if you want him to be truly happy. Offering him space inside. Offering him space outside around him. This is a very important practice. We will learn how to put more space inside and to arrange so that we have plenty of space around us. That is very crucial for our happiness. "Breathing in, I see myself as space. Breathing out, I feel free."

Many people in their lives buy a lot of ropes and tie themselves up and finally, they cannot move. First they think that these ropes are very much needed for their happiness. I would not be happy if I don't have that rope. The rope of fame. The rope of wealth. There are many kinds of ropes. I would not be happy if I could not buy that rope. So we buy all kinds of ties. Not only one to put around our necks but several kinds of ties to put around our bodies, our feelings, our perceptions and finally we can no longer move. We have no space. Happiness is impossible. That is why we have to practice to free ourselves and to put into ourselves a lot of space and around us also. This is a technique of liberation. "Breathing in, I see myself as space. Breathing out, I feel free."

During the practice we develop our floweriness. We develop our solidity. We develop our calm, stillness and we develop our freedom. These qualities combined together we call Buddha nature. If Bao-tich sits still, that means he wants to recuperate, to restore some of his Buddha nature so that he becomes more calm, more joyful, more loving. All of you can do like him and also, even better, you can become like a Buddha. So the Buddha is not something outside. The Buddha may be a person like Shakyamuni. But the Buddha nature should be in you and if you practice well you can touch that Buddha nature in you and you will develop your floweriness, your solidity, your freedom and your stillness.

Let us ask someone to sing "Breathing in, Breathing out" for us. Let us sit beautifully and practice. We don't sing with her. We just practice the song. And, I am doing the movements. If you like you can do the movements, but the movements are not enough. We have to breathe



and become a real flower and to become a real mountain. When I breathe in, I see myself as a mountain, I really feel I am a mountain.

Breathing in, breathing out,  
Breathing in, breathing out,  
I am blooming as a flower,  
I am fresh as the dew.

I am solid as a mountain,  
I am firm as the earth,  
I am free.

Breathing in, breathing out,  
Breathing in, breathing out,  
I am water, reflecting,  
What is real, what is true.

And I feel there is space  
Deep inside of me,  
I am free, I am free, I am free.

You see, meditation can be fun. There are many ways of practicing meditation, and you can meditate in music as well. Now I would like to offer Bao-tich, the young people, and the less young the practice of visiting the Buddha within. Don't think that this statue is the Buddha. It's made of clay only. We want the real Buddha. The real Buddha is made of these four elements: freshness, solidity, stillness and freedom. And you know that these elements are within. I like to touch the real Buddha and not the clay Buddha. A clay Buddha is sometimes helpful because it helps us to go home to touch the real Buddha.

You may sit down beautifully and you breathe in, breathe out a few times and you put your right hand on your heart and you say, "Hello, Little Buddha, are you there?" You ask first the question, "Hello, my little Buddha, are you there?" And you listen. You listen with all your heart. If you are too agitated, too troubled, you might not hear the little Buddha answering you very clearly. So you ask him for the second time, "Hello, little Buddha, are you there?" If you pay attention, you will hear his voice or her voice, "Yes, I am here." But it may not be very clear. The voice of the Buddha becomes clearer and clearer as you become calmer and more solid. You may ask for the third time, "Hello, little Buddha are you there?" And you listen. This time the Buddha's voice is very clear, "Yes, surely, I am always there for you."

Remember the first mantra. The Buddha is practicing the first mantra. "I am always there for you, my darling." And then when you hear the voice of the Buddha in you, you say, "I am very glad. You are my freshness. You are my floweriness." And the Buddha says, "Yes, I am your freshness, your floweriness." Do try to cultivate your floweriness. And then you say, "Dear Buddha, you are also my stability. You are a mountain in me." And you listen, and the Buddha says, "Yes, I am your stability. I am your solidity. I am the mountain in you." You hear it. You hear the Buddha answering you very clearly. Sometime if you speak English, the voice will be in English. If you speak German, the voice will be in German. I am sure, because that is your Buddha.

"Dear Buddha, you are my stillness, my calm, is that right?" And the Buddha says, "Yes, I am your stillness. I am your calm." You become glad and you say, "Dear Buddha, you are my freedom. You are space within me and around me." And the Buddha in you will say, "Yes. I am your freedom. I am space in you and surrounding you. And you say, "Dear little Buddha, I am very glad that you are there for me." And the Buddha says, "Yes. I am always there for

you. I am glad that you visit. Come and visit often.” You say, “Dear Buddha, I need you very much. Without you, I would suffer.” And the Buddha says, “Yes, I will try my best to be with you all the time, and I also need you. If you visit me often, I will be clearer. I will be more apparent and I can help you better.”

Visiting the Buddha at least once a day is important. If you get agitated several times a day, it is very important to visit your Buddha several times a day. This is the end of your Dharma talk. When you hear the bell, stand up, bow to the sangha and go out to continue your learning and practice.

[Bell, the children leave]

My dear friends, it is very important to make a connection with our ancestors and the future generations. Alienation is a kind of sickness. There are people who don't feel they are connected with anything at all and they suffer from being cut off, from loneliness. There is no understanding. There is no love that can nourish them. Therefore, to practice restoring the connection is very important.

I always feel that I am the continuation of my ancestors. Every day I practice touching my ancestors. In my country every home has an altar for ancestors, blood ancestors and spiritual ancestors. An altar is just a table, but it is very important. You place that table in the central part of your house and you focus your attention on the table as the point of contact between you and your ancestors. Usually every morning we come and offer some incense to our ancestors. Our ancestors do not need to smell incense, but we want to light a stick of incense to our ancestors because the practice of lighting incense focuses our attention on the presence of our ancestors. During the time you strike the match, you light the stick of incense, you offer the incense on the table, you have an opportunity to touch your ancestors within yourself. You realize that your ancestors are always alive in you because you are the continuation of your ancestors.

In your sitting meditation you can practice like this, “Daddy, I am your son. I am your daughter.” That is a fact. You know it so well, but you don't feel it sometimes. You feel that your father is one person and you are another person. But in fact that is not so. You are a very real continuation of your father. It is like the plant of corn is the continuation of the seed of corn. Although the statement is very simple, you have to perceive it, to feel it, to live the reality of it. “Daddy, I am your daughter, I am your son.” No matter how hard it is for you to make the statement, you have to make it because that is the truth. Even if between you and your father there is a lot of difficulty, you still are his continuation. You are still him. All the sufferings that he endured may be still in you, and it is up to you to work for the transformation. If you are able to transform the suffering in you, you have your father in you, you practice for both of you.

Maybe when you were young, you suffered so much already you are determined to be very different from your father. You will never do what he has done to you. You were so determined, and yet because you don't know how to transform the energies that has been transmitted by him to you, when you grow up, you have the tendency to behave exactly like he did. That is called the wheel of *samsara*, the vicious circle. We know we hate that. We don't want to do it, but we still continue to do exactly that. We make our children, our partners, suffer also.

The habit energy is transmitted from generation to generation. The only way is to recognize that you are just the continuation of your father, your mother; you are him, you are her, and you are determined to practice to liberate you, to liberate him at the same time. That is your

blood ancestor. Your ancestors have transmitted to you many positive seeds, but also many negative seeds. It is up to you to practice to develop the positive seeds and to diminish and to transform the negative seeds. The essential is to learn how to do it, learning from the Dharma, learning from the Sangha.

We know that the practice here is to cultivate mindfulness to be able to recognize the tendency, the habit energy, every time it begins to show itself. Not fighting, not suppressing, but just recognizing and embracing it with the energy of mindfulness so that it will not continue its course of destruction. If you allow it to go on its way, there will be damage done to you and to the people you love. You did not want to say that, you did not want to do that, but you said that, you did that anyway because you don't know how to take care of that habit energy. That is why there must be continued practice in order to generate the energy of mindfulness for the recognition and transformation of this habit energy.

And then there are your children and your grandchildren, your blood children. You know that they have inherited some of your habit energies. The habit energies you have received from your ancestors and also have transmitted to them. In each cell in your body you can find everything. Each cell of our body contains all the habit energies of all generations of ancestors.

You have heard of the techniques of cloning, and now we are in a position to be able to clone humans. They just take one cell and arrange to have that cell be in a position to reproduce another you. And that once again proves the teaching of the Buddha to be very close to the scientific findings of our times, that one contains the all. That is the teaching of the *Avatamsaka*, that one contains the all. So one cell in our body can contain the whole universe, can contain all our former generations, our ancestors. So you have transmitted all of that to your children and grandchildren. You don't know. It's very quick. But you have transmitted millions and millions of things to them in just one second or less. The positive and the negative at the same time you have transmitted. You are a link between your ancestors and your children. You have received and you have transmitted. You know that your children, if they are lucky, they will meet someone to help them to nourish the positive things and to transform the negative things. Otherwise, they'll carry you very far into the future without any chance of transformation and healing.

If you have the chance to practice, to do the work of transformation and healing, you may be able to help your child, your children, your grandchildren to do so. Because, if you are the continuation of your ancestors, your children are a continuation of you and you help link your children with your ancestors. You help your ancestors to link with your children.

The same thing is true with our spiritual ancestors. When I teach a young monk or a young nun or a young lay person, I always have the image that that young person is going to continue me and to continue my spiritual ancestors. So that the main thing for me to do is to transmit the best things I have received from my spiritual ancestors, only. I survive with my disciples. They will be my continuation. That is why I focus so much attention and energy and time and love toward the teaching, because that is the only way to be kind to my ancestors' transmission, transmitting the best.

There are two ways. My disciples, my students, are my continuation. My student, my disciple needs me to get connected with his or her spiritual ancestors. In me I carry the Buddha, the patriarch, my teachers and it is that sense of the Buddha, the patriarch, the teachers that I transmit to my disciples. So, my disciple needs me to get linked with all the ancestors. I serve as the link. And I need my disciple to get linked with the future generations, because without him, without her, the best things I received from my ancestors will not be transmitted. I rely

on my disciples to continue the lineage and to transmit the best things from the lineage of ancestors down to further generations. We need each other. My disciple needs me to get linked with all spiritual ancestors and I need him or her to continue me, and ancestors in the future. We need each other. This should be true with our blood family also.

When you practice meditation, which means to practice looking deeply into yourself, you see that your ancestors are still there in you. They are still there in you, alive, just because you are there. Look at this hand. You will say that this is my hand. Right, but not enough. This is also the hand of my mother. This is also the hand of my father. This is the hand of my ancestor. Remember when you were a small child. You had a fever and your mother came and she put her hand on your forehead, and felt so good. Your mother may have passed away, and you remember that lovely hand, that gentle hand, and you miss it. Still, if you look deeply into your hand, you see this is also your mother's hand. "Breathing in, I know this is also the hand of my mother. Breathing out, the hand of my mother is on my forehead." So, the hand of your mother is still available at any time. The hand of your father, the hand of your ancestors is always available, because your hand is there.

The idea of me and mine may be an obstacle. Yes, there is me, there is mine, but this is also him and his, her and hers. That is the fruit of the practice of looking deeply. This hand is also the hand of the Buddha. These feet are also the feet of the Buddha, because without the Buddha, I would not be able to make peaceful steps on this planet and to get the nourishment I need and all of us need. Without the Buddha, without my teachers, how could I have been able to walk peacefully with stability, with freedom and solidity, and with joy? This foot is my foot. This foot is also my mother's, my father's and of the Buddha's. Where else do I have to go to find my mother, my father and the Buddha? No, I don't have to go anywhere. I just touch myself deeply and I touch them all. They are always alive in me.

If you practice like that, alienation will no longer be a problem. You think you are too alone. Everyone has let you down. No, that is not true. That is an imagination. That is an illusion. The Buddha is always with you and Jesus is always with you. Your ancestors are always with you, your children also. They are always with you. Touch yourself and you can already touch your children. When you contemplate a lemon tree in spring, although you don't see any lemons yet, you may see some lemon blossoms, but you know the lemons are already there. Because the lemon tree is there, the lemon blossom is there, the lemons are there as fruit. So, even if you are a young person, you are not married yet, but if you touch yourself deeply, you can already see your children and grandchildren. A young monk, a young nun, who hasn't become a teacher, if he or she practices well, and she can touch herself and see already the presence of her disciples and grand disciples and great grand disciples in her. So, touching the present, you touch all the past and you touch all of the future, because the present moment includes all the past and all the future. If you touch one cell of your body, you touch all of your ancestors and you touch all your children and their grandchildren. This is the teaching of Lord Buddha, that one contains the many, touching the one deeply you touch the all. Touching the present moment, you touch infinity.

[Bell]

Whether you have some problems with your parents or not, I would propose that tonight in sitting meditation, you try this. "Breathing in, I know that I am the son of my father, or the daughter of my father." And we are not contented just with pronouncing the sentence. We have to see it. We have to see us as the true daughters of our fathers. We have to see the relationship, the oneness. You have only the time for an in-breath to visualize that, to touch the fact that you are truly his daughter, her daughter. If you don't succeed, try again. "Breathing in, I see myself; I know that I am your daughter." "Breathing out, I smile." I smile

at the fact that I am your daughter, I am your son.” Do it for a few times. Then, “Breathing in, I know I am your continuation. Breathing out, I know I am your continuation.”

You don’t need to imagine anything. You need only to touch reality as it is. Meditating does not mean dreaming, getting away from reality. To meditate means to touch reality as it really is, to touch suchness. And then, “Breathing in, I know I am you, my father. Breathing out I know I am you, my father.” Sometimes it is hard, but you have to succeed. Because that is true, hard fact. No one can demonstrate the opposite. “Breathing in, I know your difficulties, my father.” You have to see his difficulties; you have to really see them. There were things he did not want to say, but he said it. There were things that he did not want to do to you, but he did it. You also have done it to your children, to your beloved ones, so why do you have to condemn, to blame your father? We are weak. We are overwhelmed with our difficulties, our problems; and we do things that we don’t want to do. “Breathing in, I know, father, you have your difficulties,” and try to see these difficulties.

If you begin to see the suffering, the difficulties of your father, or your mother especially, then naturally, compassion will be born in your heart, because you have learned that understanding creates love, compassion. Try to see the difficulties, the suffering that that person has endured in his childhood, in his life, and that is the practice of looking deeply. If needed, you continue to practice for five, ten minutes or even fifteen, you have to succeed, because this is very important work. “Breathing in, I know there are things you wanted to do but you were not able to do.” You had a dream, father, not fulfilled, and you want me to fulfill that dream for you.

A father always has dreams for his son or daughter. He was frustrated; he could not fulfill that dream, that desire. Silently, unconsciously, he wants you to be able to do it. In the beginning, that desire is very strong. Later on, the suffering might coverup the desire, but the desire is still alive. All fathers and mothers have that kind of desire. And you also. So you have to find out that kind of dream and desire, and you say, “Father, I’ll do it for you.” If your father did not have a chance to practice mindful breathing, mindful walking, to get the calm and the transformation, you will do it for him. If your mother did not have the chance, you’ll do it for her. You practice for both. You practice for all of them, your ancestors. Cut through the wheel of *samsara*. Do not allow it to make you go around. Don’t allow it to be transmitted to your children, to your disciples, for your children are somehow your disciples.

Have you practiced touching the earth? Touching the earth may look like a ritual, but it is not necessarily a ritual. There are times when you lie down flat on the earth and you surrender everything. The earth is my mother. I surrender myself entirely to her. I have come from the earth and I will go back to the earth. Lie flat on the grass and be one with the earth. That is touching the earth. In Plum Village we practice the three earth touchings. The first one is to connect ourselves with our ancestors and with our children and their children. A vertical line. In the position of earth touching you have to get linked to your ancestors and to your children before you stand up. You might use all kinds of methods, like the one I just proposed to you, “Father, I am your daughter, I am your son. Father, I am your continuation; I am you. Ancestors, I am your continuation. Ancestors, father, I vow, I promise that I will try to do what you have not been able to do, to end all of these afflictions, frustrations and to open up for freedom and transformation.”

When you bow down like that and touch your ancestors, you see that you have lost your identity as a separated existence. Why? Because you realize your position in the river of being. You are only a continuation. You are only a transition. Above you there are ancestors and below you there are children and grandchildren. So you become one with the river, and

suddenly you lose your solitude of being a separated existence, because you know that you are your ancestors; you are your children. You become immortal.

First you might think that some of your ancestors are not to your liking. They made mistakes. They did wrong things. Yes, they made mistakes, they did wrong things; but they are your ancestors. Your parents are your youngest ancestors. They may have done wrong to you and to other people, but they are your ancestors, your parents. You, yourself, you are not perfect. You have done good things, yes, but you have done also wrong things: to you, to your ancestors and to your children. Who are you not to accept them as your ancestors, as your parents? The ancestors, I know, some of you are perfect. I can look up to as my example, but some of you were weak and have made mistakes, but I recognize all of you as my ancestors. Because in myself, I realize that I have strength and also weaknesses. I also make mistakes. I also make people suffer; so who am I not to accept you? So you accept your parents, you accept your ancestors. So you feel much better.

If you suffer because of your children: first you think that your children will do exactly what you tell them to do, but finally you find out that they have their own ideas, their own desires and they do things not to your liking at all. You feel a distance, a separation between you and them. Sometimes you say, they are not my children; my children are not like that. I do not recognize them as my children. My children must be like this, like this, like this. Parents have a tendency to think like that. But in fact, if we look into ourselves we say, “Sometimes I did things that did not please my parents. I have shortcomings within myself. I am not perfect. Why do I have to expect my children to be perfect?” So if you realize that you forgive your children, you will love them again, accept them again.

The first earth touching is very healing. After having touched your ancestors and accepting them entirely as your ancestors, you begin to touch your children and your grandchildren and realize that although they make mistakes and sometimes they are not very kind to you, but they are really and truly your children and your grandchildren. You have to allow them a chance—because you yourself, you want to have a chance for healing and transformation—so you get into good terms with your children again. I don’t have blood children, but I have a lot of spiritual children, and I have to practice that way, too. I cannot expect my students to be perfect. Sometimes they make terrible mistakes but I continue to love them, to help them, to give them a chance. That is my practice. Only in that way can you help them. So if you have problems with your parents, if you have problems with your children, your grandchildren, this is the practice. Learn more. Practice diligently every day and learn more from your own practice. And after one week, two weeks, you’ll feel much better. Peace will be in your heart and between you and them.

I can tell you that there are people who attended only one session of earth touching and get that transformation. They cry a lot, a lot, during the practice and after they feel very light and they connect again with their ancestors, their fathers, their mothers and their children. You may practice earth touching in many ways. Use your intelligence and creative ideas to practice. But the principle is to touch and to look deeply to see that you are only a continuation. You serve as a link between your ancestors and your children.

Now I would like to offer you the second earth touching. It is symbolized by a horizontal line. It has to do with living beings that are now around you. When you touch the earth for the second time, you practice to link with everyone who is alive in the present moment. People in your family, people in your society, people who are happy and people who are unhappy. You have to see the interconnection between you and all of them. In the process of the practice, you might suffer a little bit, but that suffering is very helpful.

First of all, you try to touch the great beings that are around you, *mahasattvas*. The great beings are around you, if you know how to look mindfully you will see that you don't need to go back into the past to find them. They are around you. Great beings are *bodhisattvas*: mindful beings who have the capacity of being solid, being joyful, being compassionate. You know that around you there are such people—and you need to recognize them, that is very important.

There are those who are now among the poor and oppressed everywhere in the world who continue to work for the liberation, for the improvement of the life conditions of living beings. They work during the day; they work during the night. They encounter a lot of misery, oppression, pain. And yet, they can still retain their energy and hope. They don't give up because they have a large heart. They can endure, they can embrace, they can include. They are great beings. And don't think that they are in the sky; they are around us. There are those whose names we hear, but there are countless of them that are not known to you, but they are there. Not only Mother Theresa is one. We know a few names, but there are a multitude of them, a little bit everywhere in society. In this assembly there are many of them I know personally, because they are motivated by a great desire, not a desire to consume, to get famous, but a desire to serve, to help, and that energy in them makes them very happy. They are animated by that desire to help, to bring relief, to bring joy to people. They are *mahasattvas*, great beings. They don't give up when they encounter difficulties. They continue. They have solidity in them. They have freshness in them. They have space in them. Even if the people they try to help shout at them, they can still smile. They don't get angry at them.

I know there are many nurses on their graduation holding a candle like this. They feel the vow to help patients as a source of tremendous energy in them, but they have not encountered the fact that the patients, the sick people, are sometimes very difficult to love. They are very demanding, very difficult at times. So these nurses who started with a very refreshing, strong desire to help sometimes have to withdraw. They were not trained in nursing school about *shanti paramita*, how to embrace, how to include, how to forbear. So in medical school, I think we have to learn the six *paramitas*, to learn how to open our heart to make it big in order for us to be able to embrace and not suffer. So great beings are those who are able to embrace, to include and not to suffer.

And we should be able to connect with them—very important for our support. Every time we think of them we feel the energy coming in again and that is why during the second prostration, the second touching of the earth, you have to be able to touch them. If you get to know some of them, personally, that would be very helpful and in the process of practice, to get to know more of them and you will get the comfort that many of them are out there. You get a strong source of support. So you fill yourself with a lot of energy and you become a great being yourself.

In the later part of the practice, you see you are one with oppressed people, with the people who suffer. You see yourself as a frog singing happily in a clear pond and you see yourself as a grass snake silently advancing in order to feed itself on the frog. You are the frog and you are the grass snake. You are the poor child in Uganda, having nothing to eat. Their legs are as thin as a bamboo stick. You are him but you are also the merchant of arms selling deadly weapons to Uganda. Our countries, America, France, Germany, produce everyday products, guns, to sell to these countries. We know that the little child does not need guns. They do need something to eat. We are that child, starving, and we are also the arms merchant who is trying to sell arms to Uganda. We have to be one with all who suffer. We are those who have to survive with drugs. And we are those who try to prevent the drugs from being brought into the country.

We are everyone. The suffering is immense. And we have to identify with all of them. And yet, we do not get drowned into the ocean of suffering because we have all the *bodhisattvas*, great beings, with us. Everyday we have to touch the earth in order to see that oneness, the interconnectedness between us and all these living beings. Out of that compassion will flow. We will know what to do and what not to do in order not to make the situation worse, to bring relief to the situation. I practice touching the earth every day. And I wish that my friends also would practice touching earth every day in order to get connected. When you get connected, all of your mental problems, mental disease will vanish. You will no longer feel cut off and alienated from the world.

[Bell]

The third prostration, the third touching the earth, is represented by a circle and this consists of giving up ideas. You know that ideas make us suffer a lot, so we try to give up ideas. Like, your idea of happiness. You have one idea of happiness and you have to look deeply into that idea to see whether that idea of happiness has made you happy or has made you unhappy. That idea may be adopted by a nation. One nation may think that this the only way to get their country happy, the people happy, and then that country is committed to that idea, that ideology for fifty years, seventy years. And there is no happiness. And finally, they release the idea. It may be too late, but I don't think it's too late, because when you abandon the idea, you have a chance. You think in order to be truly happy you have to be this, to be that, to have this, to have that, and that is very dangerous. You are committed to one idea of how to be happy and you get stuck. Happiness can come from every direction. You have to allow yourself to be free, because you have many chances to be happy. Happiness can come in one or another form, several kinds of forms. If we are committed to only one idea of happiness, we lose a lot of chances. Have you thought of looking deeply into the nature of your idea of happiness? Maybe if you can abandon your idea of happiness, you will become happy very soon.

The third touching the earth is the practice of giving up ideas. There are many ideas to be given up and today we have a chance to consider only a few. This is very important in Buddhist teachings. First of all, this body is me. The idea that this body is me, is mine, is one that we have to get rid of. You can succeed very easily, because you have already practiced the first touching and the second touching. You have begun to see that this body is not your body. This body is the body of your ancestors as well and this body is the body of your children and grandchildren. The young people in the West, they make declarations that I cannot understand. They say that this is my body. I can do what ever I want with my body. I am free. I am adult. I am more than 18 years old, so I have the freedom to anything with my life, namely with my body. So, to use drugs to commit suicide, that is my right. But according to this teaching, you don't have that right. I think legislators have to think about this. I would plead with you, those who make legislation, to reconsider, because to my insight, this body is not me, is not mine. This body I have received from my ancestors, my parents, and I have to take good care of it. Otherwise, I betray my ancestors, I betray my parents. If I use drugs; if I use alcohol; if I destroy myself; if I commit suicide, I betray all my ancestors and my parents and I also betray my children and my grandchildren. The laws in many countries supports the idea that I have sovereignty over this body. I don't think that this is a good insight. You have a duty to take good care of your body, to keep it healthy and to transmit it to your children and grandchildren. The law should be on that line of thinking.

The Buddha said, "This body is not me. I am not confined to this body. I am life without boundary." So when this body is no longer there, I continue because I am not this body. I am much larger than this body. I am my ancestors; I am my



disciples; I am my friends. I have transmitted the best of me to them, so why do I have to stop to be? So the idea that this body is me, this life span is me, you have to remove. The idea that I was born on this date. On this date I began to be. And in the future, on such and such date, I will die, I will stop being. Life span is an idea that we have to give up. Before this birth date I did not exist. And after this death date, I will no longer exist. I exist only from here to here—what an idea! The idea about a life span, the idea that this body is me. This life span is my life. Most of us are caught in that.

In fact, you are not bound to this body. You are not bound to birth and death. Your true nature is no-birth and no-death. And that is the best thing you can realize with Buddhist meditation. You have to touch your true nature of birth and death. The wave has to touch water. The wave has the right to be a wave, yes, but a wave has the right to be the water also. But if the wave knows she is water, she will not be upset anymore. She will not be afraid anymore of the so-called birth and death. So you think that from here to here you are and from here on, you are not. This is to be and this not to be. Who said, “To be or not to be, that is the question?” The Buddha said, “To be, or not to be, that is not the question!” The question is whether you know the nature of interbeing. So, the third prostration is very deep. It consists of releasing the idea of you are this body and this life span is the only time when you are, when you can be. Our ancestors are there alive. Our children are already there alive. This prostration, this touching the earth will help you touch the ultimate dimension, touch nirvana, touch the kingdom of God. Please train yourself. Practice more, learn more about the three prostrations and do them every day. You will release a lot of your pain, suffering and fear.

Today everyone is requested to participate in walking meditation. I will offer some instructions on walking meditation. We will gather around the linden tree, and there will be a microphone with which I can give some instructions on how to enjoy walking. Then after that we will participate in a formal meal, because today we want to show you how the monastics eat a meal during the retreat season. The monastics have at least one long retreat every year, called rain retreat, and in Plum Village we make the winter our three month retreat. Some of you have been on winter retreat here in Plum Village. In Buddhist countries we always have this kind of formal meal, at noontime, during the rain retreat.

We will eat together in this hall, and we eat in such a way that the energy of the sangha will penetrate into every one of us. We eat in silence. We focus our attention on the food and on the sangha. We eat in such a way that peace and joy is possible and we have reduced the rituals to the minimum, but still you can see something. If you have learned, you know what to do when you fill your bowl with food, practicing breathing in, breathing out. There is a poem for you for when the bowl is empty. There is a poem for you to breathe in and out when you serve the food. And there is a poem for you to sit down beautifully. In Buddhist monastic life, poetry is everywhere. You use poetry as a means of practicing mindfulness.

When you put your bowl in front of you, you begin to practice like sitting meditation, enjoying the sitting, the breathing, while waiting for other brothers and sisters to come in. Don't lose any minute of your time waiting, just enjoy breathing in, breathing out, enjoying the fact that you are here in Plum Village practicing with the sangha. There will be some chanting in the beginning. The monks and nuns will offer food to all the Buddhas in the cosmos and to all living beings in the cosmos. That's a way of linking to every living being. They will hold their bowls like this. They use their left hand and make this *mudra* and they will place the bowl on the two fingers and these two fingers will serve to make it stable. And they hold the bowl on the level of their eyes, like this. And with their right hand they make the *mudra* of peace, and they put it like this and they chant, “I offer this food to all Buddhas and *mahasattvas* in the whole cosmos. I offer this food to the living beings in the realms of humans, animals, vegetables, etc. And you will notice that they have a spoon and the spoon is

usually made of wood. Nowadays, they make it in plastic. To avoid the noise, you see. If you are using your fork or a spoon, please double your mindfulness. Because in monastic sitting, the meal is very quiet, very soft.

So every movement should be followed by mindfulness and it must be beautiful. It must be mindful, and we chew our food 30 times at least and we know what we are chewing. When you chew, don't chew your projects, your sorrow, your fear. You only chew what is inside your mouth, namely carrots, tofu, rice and bread and be aware that this is an ambassador coming from the cosmos to you, helping to nourish you. Just put your attention on your food and from time to time stop and look at the sangha and realize that you are protected by the sangha. You are among brothers and sisters who practice the same and you get the energy you need. Eat every morsel of food like you eat the piece of bread in the Eucharistic celebration. In each piece of bread there is the sunshine, there is the cloud, there is the earth, there is everything. And if you chew like that that is meditation, very deep. And you should radiate happiness and joy and all of us will profit from your presence. The spoon, before the offering, will be facing outward. Suppose this is the spoon and the monk will place it in the bowl facing outward. And after the offering, he will take it and place it inward. Now the food is for him, but before, it is for an offering. And then there will be a novice bringing a container of water and a few grains of food to the window and recite a gata to offer that food to living beings who are hungry. This is a symbol that when you eat, you have to think of the people, the animals who are starving.

In the time of the Buddha, one day a small snake came to take refuge close to the Buddha because there was a big bird trying to eat her. And the Buddha said to the bird, "Go away," but the bird did not accept this. So the Buddha said, "I will share with you some of my food, but leave that snake alive." And then the bird accepted. So, this story is known. The Buddha said before you eat, you put aside a little bit for the animals. It has become a tradition that in formal meals we always offer some food to the ants, the birds and so on. So the novice will be going to a window and chanting a gata in four lines and you will see it. And then the Five Contemplations. We have reduced the ritual to a minimum because you are not used to it, and I hope that you enjoy the formal meal. We organize a one here every week during the summer retreat. So everyone is invited for the walking meditation and the formal meal, all around. This is the only day of the retreat that all the hamlets are here together..

[Bell]

## Watering Our Good Seeds

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 23, 1997 in Plum Village, France

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I have a topic for Dharma discussion for the young people today. You have organized in groups, speaking the same language, and we expect you to bring your insights to the sangha tomorrow. Twenty-four hours is not a lot. I don't like to set a deadline, if you are not ready tomorrow, then after tomorrow is all right. This is the Dharma discussion topic. Please remember.

Once upon a time there was a monk who was not happy. Maybe his name was *Freres Jacques*. You know the song, *Freres Jacques*? He was a lazy monk. He did not want to ring the bell in the morning. So, once upon a time there was a monk who was not so happy, and he blamed other monks for his unhappiness. He had a roommate, and his roommate was not happy either, because that monk always complained. He complained about this, complained about that. So sometime later the other monk asked to be moved to another room, to have another roommate.

Of course, like I do, you desire to help that monk to be happy so he would stop complaining. What can I do to help him? We have to find out. We are caught in a kind of dilemma, because I know if a person does not make people around him happy, he cannot be happy himself. And this applies not only to monks. If you are unable to make the people around you happy, how can you be happy? In the teaching of the Buddha I have learned one very basic thing: happiness is not an individual matter. Maybe some of you still believe that happiness can be sought by individuals, that we should just go and look for our own kind of happiness.

Happiness we believe can be an individual matter, but according to the teaching of the Buddha, our teacher, happiness is not an individual matter. If the other person is not happy, there is no way that you can be happy. Look. Consider a couple. The couple might be husband and wife. If the husband is unhappy, do you think that the wife can be happy? No, I don't think so. If the wife is unhappy, do you think that the husband can be really happy? No. So there is no point of looking for individual happiness. If you want you to be happy, you have to make the other person happy. Take the example of another couple, a father and a son. Do you think that if the father is unhappy, the son can be happy? No. If the son suffers so much, do you think that the father can be happy himself? No. That is why it is very realistic to see and to accept the fact that happiness cannot be an individual matter.

We have to practice looking deeply to really understand the teaching of the Buddha. A mother who is unhappy cannot make her daughter happy. If her daughter suffers so much, the mother will not be able to be happy herself. So it's clear that happiness is not a personal matter. Therefore, when we look at that poor monk we see that because he is not able to make the people around him happy, namely the other brothers, he cannot be happy. He seems to be trying to look for his individual happiness. But that is wrong. It is not in line with the teaching of the Buddha. So you might come to the conclusion that in order for that monk to be happy, he has to try to make the people around him happy, right? It seems logical. It seems clear that to be happy himself, he has to be able to make his roommate happy and other monks in the same monastery happy.

But there still is another problem. That is why I need you to practice looking deeply with me. How can an unhappy person make the people around him or her happy? Is there a way? He knows that if he cannot be happy, he cannot make people around him happy. He is motivated

by the desire to make people around him happy, but because he has no happiness in himself, how could he share his happiness and make other people happy? Do you think that you have got the topic of the dharma discussion? That is a kind of dilemma. I need a young person to tell me whether I have presented the topic clearly enough.

I want you to spend one or two days sitting together, practicing breathing in, breathing out, deeply, doing walking meditation, in order to be calm, to be concentrated, and when you come together, you offer your insight as to how to help that monk. And the dilemma is that if that monk wants to be happy, he has to make people around him happy. The question remains that if he is unhappy, how can he make other people around him happy? And you grown up people, if you want to practice looking deeply to find out, you are welcome to do so.

Once upon a time there was an unhappy monk. That is the topic. But you can change the word “monk,” because it is not only a matter of monks and nuns. If you like, you can change it to an unhappy boy or girl, son or daughter, husband or wife. Chicolina, do you think it's clear enough? Good.

The last thing I would like to tell you today is that during the past week many children have practiced, have learned the practice of pebble meditation and the practice of inviting the bell of mindfulness to sound. I count on you, those who have been here one week, to help your friends who just arrived yesterday to learn about these two practices. At the end of this week they will be able to do as well as you do. Do you think that you can do it for us? Inviting the bell, and practicing the pebble meditation? Good. I think that is enough as an assignment today. Have a happy day. When you hear the bell, stand up and bow to the sangha before you leave to begin your practice.

[Bell]

Turn around to the sangha. Bow. Go slowly, beautifully, like flowers.

[Bell]

Dear friends, today is the twenty-third of July 1997 and we are in the Upper Hamlet. Listening to a Dharma talk is also a form of practice. We used to be in school, listening to lectures and so on, and during that time we got in the habit of using only our intellect, because what we needed in school was our intellect. But in a practice center a Dharma talk is not just a lecture. A Dharma talk is an opportunity to open ourselves up and to allow the deepest levels of our consciousness to be exposed to the Dharma. Instead of using the intellect, we put the intellect to rest, because our intellect has the tendency to compare, to judge, to evaluate, to arrange things and ideas and classify them into boxes.

The Dharma is not a lecture. The Dharma in the Buddhist tradition is a kind of rain. Our consciousness should behave like the soil, the earth. We have to allow the Dharma talk to penetrate. According to the Buddha we have seeds of understanding, of awakening, of compassion, within ourselves. We don't need these seeds to be transmitted from the teacher. We already have all of them in the depth of our consciousness. We call it store consciousness, sometimes earth consciousness. Because these seeds are buried deep in the mind, in the soil of our consciousness, it is very hard for them to grow and manifest. Above there are many layers of suffering, confusion, prejudices and so on, and our intellect can never go deep enough. Our intellect very often contradicts our deepest nature and therefore to allow the intellect to rest and to open our earth store in order for the rain of the Dharma to penetrate is very important. [Thây recites a poem in Vietnamese and then translates]

The spring rain is falling gently  
and the earth and the soil of my consciousness  
is penetrated by the rain.  
And the seed deep within me  
now has a chance to be penetrated by the rain and to smile, sprouting.

We have to listen to the Dharma with that kind of spirit, to allow the soil of our consciousness to be penetrated by the Dharma rain, not using ideas, concepts, that we already have to compare and to classify. That is very important. If we are already used to that kind of listening, using only the intellect to judge, to compare, to classify, we have to learn a new way, because listening to a Dharma talk is not the same thing as learning the philosophy of Buddhism. They are two things, quite different. A lady who left us yesterday said that during one hour and a half, Thây said very much the same thing. He could have done it in fifteen minutes. She was very hungry for ideas, but she did not realize that a Dharma talk is a time for practice. The teacher is supposed to offer the Dharma rain in such a way that the good seeds in the people can be penetrated and can sprout and become flowers, the flower of understanding, the flower of compassion and so on.

Using our intellect is like using a nylon sheet to order to receive the rain, or nylon buckets to receive the rain. When you use a nylon sheet, you prevent the rain from penetrating into the soil. That is why there is a way to listen to Dharma talks. That way is not to use your intellect. You let your whole person be penetrated by the Dharma, and your person includes the body. We know that our consciousness has so many layers and the deepest layers are very difficult to reach and therefore we have to bring our selves to a state of oneness. The body is there and the mind is there, the consciousness is there, and we just allow the rain of the Dharma to fall.

In the time of the Buddha it is reported in many sutras, many people would get enlightened during the Dharma talk and their eyes would get very bright and they were released from the bondage they had carried with them for a long time. When the Buddha saw that person, he always said, "That person got liberated. That person has understood. That person has been transformed." So transformation and hearing can be possible also during a Dharma talk. Don't believe that in a dharma talk you get the theory and then you go back to your tent and practice. No. Listening to a dharma talk is also a form of practice. That is why we have to sit in such a way that we are really present, body and consciousness at the same time. We have to dwell in the present moment. We have to allow ourselves to be available to the Dharma and the Dharma will be available to us.

Even if you feel sleepy and sit there dozing in the Dharma hall, it's much better than using your intellect. Yes, this is true, because even if you are sleeping, the Dharma talk has a way of penetrating you, but if you use your intellect, it is very difficult. Maybe you have had experience with someone in a coma. If you talk to her, she has a way of listening. She is present in a way that she can be receptive when you talk to her. When you allow your intellect to rest, many beautiful things can penetrate into you and you get a transformation.

There are people who after listening to a Dharma talk have felt liberated, light, joyful, and they didn't have to do much. They didn't have to listen hard or make any effort. They just opened themselves up to the Dharma to entered. That is why we should consider the one hour and a half listening to the Dharma talk as a time of practice. It may be very important.

The other day I was talking about holiness and I said that the nature of holiness can be understood, can be recognized. We call someone "His Holiness" or "Her Holiness." But what

makes us call him or her by that title “Holiness”? There is, or there may be, the substance of holiness in that person. In the Buddhist tradition the substance of holiness is mindfulness.

When I wrote *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, I said that mindfulness is the energy of the Buddha that is in you and its nature is the same nature as the Holy Spirit, because where there is mindfulness, there is life. Where there is attention, there is life. When you drink a glass of orange juice in mindfulness, you are real and the juice is real, and because you and the juice are real, life is real. If you drink your orange juice in forgetfulness, you are caught by your anger, your jealousy; you are caught by the past, by the fear of the future, you are not really there for your orange juice and your orange juice is not really there for you. So you and orange juice, both of you are not real, and therefore, life is not real at that moment.

So to drink mindfully means to be alive again, to live deeply that moment of orange juice drinking. Since the energy of mindfulness is in you, the energy of holiness is in you. Where there is mindfulness there is life, your presence and the presence of life in you. Then if you continue to contemplate mindfulness, you will see that you will become more concentrated. Yes, you drink mindfully your orange juice, you are concentrated, even if your juice is not concentrated. Every step you make when you practice walking meditation makes you concentrated. You touch life deeply every step you make. So mindfulness is there and concentration is there, also.

Mindfulness carries within itself the energy of concentration. If you are concentrated, you are strong. When you look deeply, you touch deeply, and because you are able to look deeply and touch deeply, you get insight. You understand the nature of what is there: the object of your touching, the object of your looking. Therefore, the energy of concentration carries itself. The energy of insight is a liberating factor. If we suffer because we don't understand, because we are overwhelmed by illusion, ignorance, once we get insight we no longer suffer. We are no longer angry and suspicious. Therefore, our insight is the liberating factor, and without concentration and mindfulness, insight would not be possible. That is why I said that the energy of mindfulness is the vehicle transporting concentration and concentration carries itself.

*Prajna* is insight. Concentration is *samadhi*, and mindfulness is *smrti*. Smrti, samadi, and prajna are the three steps of training in the Buddhist path. Our practice is recognizing the seed of mindfulness in us. In holy people, there is a seed of mindfulness, but in all of us there is also a seed of mindfulness. If you practice recognizing that seed deep in our consciousness and help it to grow and to manifest often, the energy of mindfulness increases all the time and it is the substance of holiness in us. So, first of all, the practice is to recognize that we do have that seed deep in our consciousness and this is easy because every one of us is able to drink our juice mindfully. Every one of us is able to look at a flower mindfully. Every one of us is capable of breathing in mindfully. So the seed of mindfulness is really there, deep inside of us. We don't live our daily life mindfully because we have not allowed that seed of mindfulness in us to be touched every day by ourselves and by the people around us. We have not been able to make it grow and become important in our lives.

The practice of mindfulness is first of all to recognize that seed and to do everything for that seed to be touched every day and to become a source of energy that will make us more alive in our daily life. When we know how to live mindfully, we live concentrated. And if we live concentrated, we begin to understand deeply. When we understand deeply, we suffer much less. If these three kinds of energies are within us, we are a holy person. We have no complex about that, because we know exactly what holiness means.

Holiness is something we can recognize. It is not abstract. If we look at a person and we know that she is mindful, she is alive, she is concentrated in each moment of her daily life, she is able to understand, to be compassionate, to forgive, then we know that holiness is in her. You can call her "Your Holiness." No complex. Holiness is not a title conferred to someone just by society, but by the fact that we are able to generate the energy of mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

[Bell]

The bell of mindfulness was created to help us touch the seed of mindfulness and make it manifest. Every time we hear the sound of the bell, we go back to our breath and we breathe mindfully. Mindfulness of breathing nurtures the energy of mindfulness in us. It's easy to practice if you are surrounded by a sangha, brothers and sisters who do the same. In Plum Village, every time you hear the bell, you see all the brothers and sisters going back to their breathing and enjoying their in-breath and their out-breath. You will do the same in a very natural way. In a few weeks, you will get the habit, the good habit of going back to your mindful breathing.

The same is true with your mindful walking. In Plum Village everyone walks mindfully. Each step is an opportunity for us to touch the seed of mindfulness in us. We enjoy every step we make. Before the practice, we only know how to run. We run because we think that happiness is not possible now and here. We have to run to the other end where happiness may be available. We have a long, long habit of running. We run even in our dreams. Our ancestors have run, and they have transmitted their habit of running to us and we shall transmit the habit of running to our children.

When we come to Plum Village, we learn that happiness is available in the here and the now. Why to you have to run? To breathe in and out feeling that you are alive, and to make a step feeling that walking on this beautiful planet is already a miracle, is enough for you to be happy right now. You don't need another condition to be happy. So learning to be happy here and now with the conditions of happiness that are already available, this is what we learn in Plum Village. That is why everyone tries to block the old habit of running. Blocking in a very nice way, not by fighting, but by initiating a new habit, the habit of walking like a free person, like a happy person. In the beginning you might pretend to be a free person, a happy person, because the habit is so strong, but after a few days being in the sangha, you know that you can do it, you can enjoy every step you make. You say, "It's so simple! Why didn't I know about it? Just breathe in, make a step, smile and you can be happy." Some people still wonder, "How could it be so simple?" Something this simple might not be true, because we are used to complicated things. There is a person who was reading one of my books in a bus, and after reading it—it's a very short book—she closed it and began to practice right on the bus. She felt wonderful, because she didn't believe that truth is something very complicated.

Every two years we have a 21-day retreat here in Plum Village and everyone has to attend the whole retreat. We don't go in and out like in the summer opening here. On the first day, everyone is offered a sticker that they can put on their shoes. The sticker says, "I walk for you." If you can make a peaceful step and get nourishment from that step, get peace and joy from making that step, not only do you make yourself healed, transformed, joyful, but you make other people happy, also. When you are happy you have something to share. When you are happy, you can make people around you happy. Our parents may not have had the chance to enjoy mindful breathing, mindful walking, and they hurried for all their life. They didn't know how to enjoy their in-breath, out-breath, relaxation, and dwelling happily in the present moment. Now, we have a chance to learn it so that every breath I take in, I feel freedom, I feel relaxation, I feel peace.

I breathe in not only for me but I breathe in for all my ancestors. Practicing looking deeply, I know that all my ancestors are still alive in me, present in me. I am the continuation of my ancestors. Therefore I breathe in and I invite my mother, my father, my grandfather to breathe in with me. It's wonderful. I practice for them. I also practice for my children, because anything I do to me, I do to my ancestors, I do to my children. That awareness keeps me alive, keeps me on the right path. I wouldn't like to do anything that is harmful to my ancestors, to my children, to my grandchildren. That is love.

I have many children and grandchildren—many disciples, monastics and lay. I know if I am not mindful, they will suffer so much. So every step I make is for them. Every breath I take is for them. I should nourish myself with peace, with joy, for the sake of my ancestors, for the sake of my children and their children. Every step I make, every breath I take, is the practice of love. That is why we distribute the sticker, “I walk for you.” So it is your duty to make a step in a relaxing way to feel that you are alive. It is a privilege to be alive, to be still walking on this beautiful planet, to touch peace and love within ourselves. One step is very much, because if you are able to make one step, you will be able to make two, and so on. I walk for you. I walk for my parents, my ancestors. Many people have brought their stickers home and continued their practice.

I have said that the practice should help us to recognize the seed of mindfulness in us and help it to manifest in our breathing, in our walking, in our eating, in our conversation and so on. In the Buddhist tradition, mindfulness is the substance of a Buddha. The Buddha is not something vague, a god, or just one person. The Buddha is the energy of mindfulness that is inherent in every one of us and we can make the Buddha in us grow apparent, strong. That light can shine on our life and help us to go in the direction of love, the direction of understanding.

The training here helps increase the capacity to be mindful. Yes, you are capable of being mindful, but we want you to increase that capacity. Every time you drink water and juice and tea, we want you to drink in mindfulness, not just from time to time. Every time you walk, we want you to walk mindfully, not just from time to time. The sangha is here to remind you, to support you. During the time that you are here with your sangha, please use the opportunity to really practice. Whether you go from your tent to the bathroom or to the kitchen or to the meditation hall, adopt only one style of walking, walking meditation. Take more time and enjoy the walking.

In Plum Village, the monks and the nuns, all of them sign a treaty with their stairs. In your home there may be stairs, because you go up to sleep there and then in the morning you go down. There are days when you have to go up and down your stairs several times. When you sign a treaty with the stairs, you want to go up and go down only with peaceful, mindful steps. I have a hermitage very close to here and there are stairs. In 18 years I always go up and go down mindfully, enjoying every step. Never I have betrayed my treaty, violated my treaty. It has helped me. Now I can climb the Gridhrakuta Mountain, I can climb the Wu Tai Shan Mountain. I can climb any mountain, and everywhere I walk, including railway stations and airports, I walk in the same style: walking meditation, enjoying every step. I have quit running.

After signing that treaty, you have to respect it. Halfway up the stairs if you realize that you have not been walking mindfully, stop and go down again. Begin anew, breathing in, a step, and breathing out, another step, enjoying. It is very important. If you don't have stairs, then you can sign a treaty with a distance: for instance, the path that leads from your house to the bus station. You make a vow: from your house to that place you always walk mindfully. And



if halfway you know that you have made unmindful steps, you go back. You walk again. Don't make it too long, to begin with. You will see the wonderful effect of such a practice on your life. Some years later you will find that you are walking the same way everywhere. You do that not only for yourself; no, you do it for all of us, for your children, for your ancestors, also.

There are many, many pleasant ways of doing it. There are several gathas like the one we sang here this morning. There are many wonderful gathas in Plum Village. Please learn them from your dharma teachers, from your brothers and sisters in the dharma. And practice with several gathas instead of just one. Like when you breathe in, you make two steps, “flower, flower”; and when you breathe out, you make another two steps, “fresh, fresh.” Or if you want to go faster, you make three steps: “flower, flower, flower; fresh, fresh, fresh.” But don't do it mechanically. Don't say the word—practice it. When you say, “flower, flower, flower,” you have to be a flower. When you say “fresh, fresh, fresh,” you have to make freshness into a reality. Otherwise, what are you doing?

After a few minutes, you may change to “mountain, solid.” Breathing in, you say, “mountain, mountain,” and you transform yourself into a mountain. You are walking with dignity. Each step is stability. You are not running. There are animals who walk like that, very majestically. The Buddha, also, he walked like that. The monks and the nuns during the time of the Buddha used to hold a begging bowl and they walked like that. They radiate peace. People who saw them, many of them knelt down on the sidewalk, because people need this kind of stability and peace. So when you walk like this, you generate the energy of peace and stability within you and you inspire all of us. If it happens that I lose my awareness and I get into a hurry and I see you walking like that, your sight will be a bell of mindfulness bringing me back to myself and there I am walking beautifully again. That is why every one of us should make a contribution to the sangha by his way or her way of walking and listening to the bell. Together we generate a powerful source of mindfulness that will penetrate into every one of us.

When I first came to America, I heard people say that a retreat should have no more than 30 people, otherwise it would not be serious. I didn't believe that too much, because I knew that if everyone in the retreat is mindful and if you combine the mindfulness of a large number of people, it will be very powerful. Everyone who happens to be there will be penetrated by the tremendous amount of energy emanating from the crowd. There were times when we practiced walking meditation with two thousand two hundred people in America. The people who came for the Day of Mindfulness had been in retreats and their practice was quite solid. There was no noise at all; there was no disorder at all. Everyone was walking mindfully, and it was very powerful. The energy penetrated each of us.

So if all of us, 300 or 400, know how to enjoy walking, generating stability and joy, then the collective energy will be powerful and every one of us will inherit, will profit from, that kind of energy. Each of you is needed. We need your contributions to the collective energy of the sangha and walking mindfully, breathing mindfully, drinking mindfully, doing things mindfully is the way to do it. That practice helps increase the capacity to be mindful in us and in the people around us. Also, the practice in Plum Village helps to increase the capacity to keep mindfulness alive. Yes, all of us are capable of being mindful, but our mindfulness vanishes very quickly. We need the sangha to keep our mindfulness alive for a longer time.

When you are mindful, concentrated, you are a Buddha. But many of us are part-time Buddhas only. We have to learn how to be a full-time Buddha, and that is our path. The old energy always pushes us in the opposite direction—forgetfulness. In order to counter that old energy, you have to create a new habit energy, the habit energy of being mindful. A very nice

way, there is no war. There is only a transformation. Meditation is not a fight, even against the old habits, the negative things. To meditate means to embrace the negative. But you need to have something in order to embrace: what is embracing what? It is the new habit, it is the new energy generated in you, that would be the agent which embraces the old habit.

In the first dharma talk given here, I said that the old habit energy is very strong. Many times we did not want to do it, many times we did not want to say it. We knew that if we said it, if we did it, it would cause damage. But finally we did it, we said it. We regret it very much later on. We are determined that next time we will not do it, we will not say it, but when the circumstances arise we do it again, we say it again. It has caused a lot of damage within us. We are frustrated because we have the feeling that it is stronger than us, in fact it is stronger. Because our mindfulness is too weak. That is why we come together and practice touching the seed of mindfulness, helping it grow, learning how to increase our capacity of being mindful, our capacity of keeping our mindfulness alive. When we have that energy, we have something with which to embrace those old bad habits, the negative things. And embracing them long enough, we will diminish the power of the negative. It is like the heat in the home. When we want to refresh the atmosphere in the home we turn the air conditioning on. The cool air isn't going to fight the hot air. The cool air comes and embraces the hot air, and it makes the hot air cooler. But the important thing is that the cool air must be continually generated. You cannot turn it on and then turn it off. So you have to learn how to keep mindfulness alive for a longer period of time so your mindfulness can have enough time to embrace your forgetfulness, your negative habit energy, with tenderness, and not with an intention to fight.

Every time your habit energy shows itself, begins to manifest, thanks to our mindful breathing, mindful walking, you recognize it, and you smile at it. You say, "I know that you are there, I am taking good care of you," and you embrace it. That's our practice: no fighting. You should know that we are not responsible for the habit energy all by ourselves. Many of these habits have been transmitted. Some of them have been transmitted by our mother or by our father, and when we see that energy coming up we can say, "Hello Mother, I know you are there. I will take good care of you." Then you are in good hands again. Mindfulness is the Buddha. The Buddha is taking care of you. Don't worry. You know how to invite the Buddha, and to keep him, keep her, with you. The techniques of walking, of breathing, of doing things mindfully, is what we learn while being in Plum Village.

We have to know a little bit about ourselves in order for the practice to be easy and natural, and according to the teaching of the Buddha we are made of five elements. There is a teacher of mathematics who trained here who went back to Toronto. When he resumed his classes, he wiped the board with mindfulness, slowly and peacefully. His students were very surprised. They asked him, "Are you OK, Daddy?" because he was very much in a hurry before. He turned around and said, "No, I'm OK, I'm trying to do it mindfully." I was wiping the board in mindfulness and his image appeared again to me.

Suppose we draw a circle here representing something like an orange, and suppose that the orange has five sections. So this is the first section, the second one, the third one, the fourth and the fifth. The first section of the orange represents our body, our form, *rupa*. Meditation has to do with our body. There are many sutras, many scriptures, about how to meditate on our body. The second section of the orange represents our feelings. To meditate is also to observe our feelings, to take care of our feelings, and we have to learn how. In Plum Village, we don't learn Buddhism, we learn only how to practice well.

Then we have our perceptions. To meditate is to become mindful of the perceptions, to look deeply into the perceptions, in order to see their nature. Mindfulness is intervening to shine light upon our perceptions. Many times our perceptions are wrong and mindfulness helps us

to see that they are wrong. When we know that a perception is wrong, we are liberated. It is like when in twilight you see a snake, you get scared, you run, you scream, and when a friend brings a torch, you recognize that it's not a snake. It is only a piece of rope. That is a wrong perception. Wrong perceptions always create anger, fear, distress, and so on. That is why meditating on perceptions helps to dissipate a lot of suffering.

Mental formation is the fourth section of the orange. "Formation" is a technical term: it means things that are made by different elements, like this flower is a formation. If we look deeply into the flower, we see many components, like the rain, the sunshine, the clouds, the soil, the minerals, the farmer, the gardener, and so on. When something is made from different kinds of elements, that something manifests itself as the object of our perception, and it is called a formation. All formations are impermanent. Here we have business with mental formations. Fear is a mental formation. Craving is a mental formation. Compassion is also a mental formation. Love is a mental formation. There are many wholesome mental formations; there are unwholesome mental formations. In my tradition we distinguish fifty-one categories of mental formations. As a novice I had to learn them by heart: wholesome mental formations, unwholesome mental formations, and so on.

I have to tell you that feeling is also a mental formation, and perception is also a mental formation, but they are too important. That is why you have to single them out as a category. This kind of analysis is not for the sake of analysis. This analysis is for the sake of practice. You have to remember that if in the teaching of the Buddha there is an analysis, the analysis is to help you to see and to practice well. It does not mean that this is the only way to present reality. No. Buddhism is not there to give you the only way, the only description of reality. The teachers are there to help you to understand yourself and to practice well.

So feeling is one of the fifty-one mental formations, perception is another one, therefore this category has only forty-nine mental formations. These mental formations don't manifest all at the same time. If they do, I think we cannot be alive. Imagine the television set and every channel manifests at the same time: not possible. So just one or two, sometimes three, but I think three is the maximum. This section of the orange represents something like the screen of our television, or the screen of the computer. Let us use the image of the computer. So each program appears on the screen of the computer, and you can bring some other things up to intervene. You can make a window, you can paste something in, for instance. If I lived in the time of the Buddha I could not give a dharma talk like this because they would not know what a computer is! So when they don't manifest, where are they? They must be somewhere, hidden somewhere, in order to manifest one by one like that. That is why we need the fifth section of the orange. It's called "consciousness."

Consciousness here means the lower part of our consciousness. In the Sarvastivada school it is called the base consciousness, the consciousness of the base. In Mahayana Buddhism we call it "store consciousness" because it has the capacity to store all the mental formations so that each of them will be able to manifest later as a mental formation.

I spoke to you at the beginning of the Dharma talk about this section of the orange: consciousness as the soil of the mind, containing all kinds of seeds. Each mental formation stays there in the form of a seed. A seed means something that has not manifested yet. That is the technical term "*bija*," seeds. So your anger is there in the form of a seed. Now you are not angry at anyone, you are fine, but that does not mean that anger is not in you. It is in you, but in the form of a seed only. You may think that anger is not in you, but that is not correct. If someone comes and says something, and touches that seed of anger, you will see that seed manifests itself and you will soon be overwhelmed by the energy of anger.

So bija is the seed, and we have all kinds of seeds in us, positive and negative. We have the seed of perfect enlightenment in us, that is the Buddha-to-be in us. We have the seed of Mara in us. We have the seed of holiness in us, and we have the seed of unholiness in us. So sometimes we may be called “His Holiness,” sometimes “His Unholiness.” The mind is a screen upon which every mental formation can be revealed. A good practitioner knows how to keep the negative seeds here [in the storehouse consciousness], and tries by his or her practice to help the positive seeds to manifest. If the positive seeds continue to manifest here, the negative seeds become smaller, smaller, less important. When they are tiny, not important, it is difficult for them to manifest. I don't get angry very often. Even when I get angry, you might not see it. You may say, “I have never seen Thây angry,” and you believe anger is not in me. That is not true. The seed of anger is always in me, but since I practice I don't give it a lot of chance.

You also have to see things in terms of interbeing. When you practice do not entertain the hope that you will wipe out all the negative things in you. Please don't! It's like a gardener. She only wants to have flowers and no garbage in her garden. But it is a necessity for a flower to become garbage. You cannot keep a flower alive forever and ever. There will be a time when a flower has become a piece of garbage. The love in us can be like that, is like that too. But a good organic gardener is not afraid of garbage, because she knows perfectly how to transform the garbage back into flowers. Both flowers and garbage are made of organic matter. Mental formations are also organic. This is very interesting: all our mental formations are of an organic nature. That is why we can transform. Love can be transformed into hate. But if you have hate, don't be afraid. Learn, learn how to transform your hate back into flowers. Many couples after two, three years living together, see that their love has transformed into hate. In the beginning, “How can I survive without her?” But now, “How can I survive with her?”

So love has transformed into hate. But if we know the law of transformation, we know also that it is possible for us to transform garbage back into flowers. The hate, anger, if we know how, we can transform them. So may I urge you not to be afraid of your sorrow, your pain, your afflictions. Don't be eager to throw them away, because it is exactly with these materials that you can fabricate the flower of understanding and love in you. That is the principle of nonduality that is so important in the Buddhist tradition. An organic gardener is not afraid of the heap of garbage. She is confident. She does not want to throw the garbage away because she knows that she is capable of transforming the garbage back into flowers, into lettuce, cucumbers. So smile to them, say “I know you are there, I am going to take good care of you and make you into flowers.” Don't throw anything away.

So day is because night is. Enlightenment and affliction, they inter-are. It is like the lotus. Although they are fragrant, beautiful, refreshing, all of them grow from the mud. But they don't smell like mud. That is why the Buddhists like very much to use the symbol of the lotus. You live in the world of afflictions, of suffering, and yet you are able to make use of them, to transform them. You live in the world, but you are not overwhelmed or affected by the world. Instead you can help the world to transform.

If you live in a couple, if you live in a family, if you live with another person or several persons, you may ask them to be careful. You may ask them to be aware of the seeds you have in your store consciousness. “Darling, I know that I have these negative seeds in me. And every time these seeds manifest, I make myself suffer and I make you suffer, also. So, please, if you love me, if you care for me, be careful not to water these seeds in me.” Among lovers, there should be such an agreement. That is the practice. “Darling, if you really love me, water the positive seeds in me, because I do have the seeds of understanding, of compassion, of forgiveness, of joy in me. Even if they are still small, if you know how to

touch them in me every day, I become a much happier person and when I am happy, you don't have to suffer as much.”

If you really understand what your store consciousness is, you understand yourself. If you understand the person you love with her weaknesses and her strengths, you would know what we call the practice of selective watering of seeds. Refrain from watering the negative seeds in him. Try your best to identify and to water the positive seeds in him every day, and you will see the situation will improve in just one week. The degree of happiness will increase very quickly, especially when you are supported by brothers and sisters within the practice to show you the way.

Consciousness sometimes is called *sarva bijaka*. “Bija” means seeds and “sarva” means all, all seeds. This is the totality of the seeds that are in you, the consciousness of the totality of the seeds.

When you live mindfully, you will be able to identify each variety of seeds that is about to manifest. When there is a stimuli and a seed is about to manifest, you know already and you immediately begin the practice of mindful breathing and walking. Stop everything else. This is very important. If you don't, the seed will manifest. When the seed manifests it is still possible for you to practice, but it is better that you practice when it is about to manifest. If you can do that it means that you have been practicing mindful walking, mindful breathing for several weeks. When a seed is about to be agitated, to be watered, you know and you put yourself in a state of being alert and you practice. You practice for you, yes, but you practice for him, for her. She will be grateful for you because you know how to take care of yourself, because taking care of yourself is to take care of him or her.

"I walk for you, I breathe for you." Selective watering of seeds is your practice and it does not take a long time. You can transform your situation very quickly.

## Overcoming the Fear of Death

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 28, 1997 in Plum Village, France.

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My dear friends,

Today is the twenty-eighth of July 1997 and we are in the Upper Hamlet. I remember in the old time, about ten years ago, there was a little boy who came to Plum Village to practice. He spent one day in Plum Village and then two days in Plum Village and then he liked it. There were a lot of children practicing and playing with him. So during a tea meditation, rather lemonade meditation, he said "Everything is wonderful here except one thing—there is no television." But he survived. Survived and then he continued and stayed several weeks in Plum Village. One of his conclusions before leaving Plum Village: that it is possible to survive without television. You can have many kinds of joy and you can nourish yourself with these joys. You don't need television. I am not against television. There are many wonderful programs. I only call for attention because there are many programs of television that are not very healthy to us. They bring us so many toxins.

There was another boy who arrived in Plum Village and he found it too quiet. Many hundred people staying here and yet too quiet and he wanted to leave right away. I think his parents had negotiated with him that if he would stay in Plum Village for one week, then they would bring him to the seashore for two weeks. He thought that was a good deal—one week in Plum Village and then two weeks at the beach. But when he arrived in Plum Village, he found it so calm that he didn't like it at all. He hated it and he wanted to go right away. He was very strong, very determined and his parents were in despair because his parents loved Plum Village and they wanted very much to practice in Plum Village. So they were about to give up and leave Plum Village with their child. Suddenly Sister Chang Khong appeared and she said, "Okay, you can leave, but stay just for one hour." Then she brought a few children to come and play with him and he liked it and he accepts to stay for one day. He was a special person to be taken care of, so other children were asked to take care of him. He got the attention of other young people and he liked it. He found that the children here are very nice—kind to him. So he accepted to stay for another day and then he extended it to several days. The young man liked it and he agreed to stay for one whole week. At the end of the week, he proposed to his parents to stay on. He didn't want to go to the beach anymore. He wanted to stay in Plum Village for two more weeks.

I think it is possible to be happy without watching television a lot. Again, I want to say that I am not against television, because we can profit a lot from television. But we should have an intelligent policy. I think that the family should get together and discuss how to use the television. Everyone has to be present and we should agree on what kind of programs we should view and what kind of programs we should not view. I think we should have a TV magazine to find out what we can see and what we should not see.

I know a family in Boston. They selected the programs of television very carefully. If they see in the program a very good film, they agree that everyone should be present to view the film together. Grandma, Daddy, Mommy, everyone wears their best dress and goes to the living room and sit very comfortably and watches television, like going to the cinema, it's like a ritual. Imagine, Grandma puts on her best dress and wants all her grandchildren to come and sit close to her. She is very happy. Watching that film alone would not make her as happy as watching together with the whole family.

In our modern times, the family does not have a lot of chance to be together. Sometimes people eat at different times. That is a pity. We should arrange so that we eat together as a family at least once a day. Is that too much—once a day? We should practice walking meditation, together the whole family, at least once a week. If you live near the beach or the bank of the river, or a woods, it would be wonderful if the whole family could organize a walking meditation together for thirty or forty-five minutes. That is my wish. We can bring some of the things that we practice at Plum Village home, like together doing a session of total relaxation in the living room. Everyone has to learn how to conduct such a session. Even if you are still very young, you can conduct a session of total relaxation. As you know, for sitting meditation, you don't have to sit a lot. You sit for a number of breaths only breathing in, breathing out. You may like to use pebble meditations. Adults can also practice pebble meditations with their children. So I rely, I trust, that you use your intelligence to organize the practice at home. We count on you very much.

When I was in Italy a few months ago, I gave a retreat where there were many children. There was a little girl who had a little sister and hated her. One day she told her parents, "Why don't we kill her?" She meant her younger sister. Because people are inclined to eliminate the things they don't like. We live in a technological world. There are many quick ways to eliminate what we don't want. A sister wants to kill her younger sister because she does not get along with her, she was so demanding. It upsets me a lot when I hear the story.

I think in television you watch programs like Power Rangers. In that series, Power Rangers, you have the power to destroy everything that you don't like, and of course there are many things that we don't like around us. There was a little girl who pointed a toy gun at her mother and said, "I want to shoot you down." When we have something wrong within our body, we have the tendency to open our body, cut it, and throw it out. We call it surgery. We want to do it quickly. We don't know that there are many other ways. We don't know how to embrace the block of pain in us, to take care of it, so that it can be transformed. We only think of throwing away, eliminating with guns, with knives, scissors, and things like that. What a civilization we have. Therefore we have to think deeply about this and watching television can increase our bad tendency of wanting to eliminate whatever we don't want.

Television can increase your craving, your fantasy, and it does not help you to understand the hardships, the difficulties, of your parents and so on. Many programs can increase your violence, your anger, your wish to eliminate whatever you don't like. Your inability to embrace, to forbear, to help. That is why we need to look deeply. I urge that the whole family get together and have a deep discussion on this. After five days of retreat, the girl was transformed deeply because we especially took care of her. With the whole sangha and the sangha of young people, we had a very good program for young people at that retreat. When she got back to school she wrote a story about David and Angelina that got her a very high note from the teacher. That evening when her baby sister cried instead of kicking her or beating her, she said, "Be quiet. I am here for you my sister." She practiced the second mantra, by herself, alone. I can see in that little girl there are so many good seeds, but because of watching so many bad television programs, the good seeds had not been able to manifest. These programs only water the bad seeds in her. Going into a retreat where the setting is quite different, she was able to practice some quiet breathing, walking, surrounded by people who are calm. All these things have helped touch the good seeds within the child. Five days, only five days, helped her to transform and she became a very lovely sister.

So I am not pessimistic. I know the good seeds are in every one of us. If we have the opportunity to take care of the young people, they grow up beautifully. Mindfulness helps us to look more deeply and to reorganize our daily life. We should not allow ourselves and our children to get intoxicated every day. This is the true practice, the concrete practice, of the

five mindfulness trainings and the children can very well practice it. If the adults practice, the children will follow.

One lady in England told me that during more than ten years she had the habit of taking two glasses of wine and nothing bad has happened to her. She said that she cannot take the fifth mindfulness training because she does not want to abandon her two glasses of wine, which are so good. She used many pretexts: "You know, Thay, wine is part of our civilization?" and so on. She talked a lot. She was trying to defend herself a lot. I was sitting very quietly and I did not say anything. I saw that she was very tempted to take all five mindfulness trainings. She was struggling till the last minute. Finally, I said, I know you are going to take all the five mindfulness trainings tomorrow. You say no tonight, but tomorrow you will do so. Because I know that you know very well that you are taking the five mindfulness trainings not only for yourself, but for your children. Because two glasses of wine have done no harm to you, but who knows what happens with your children. Maybe two glasses of wine can make one of your children become an alcoholic person, because your children are not exactly like you. So if you refrain from these two glasses of wine, the children will look up to you and they will naturally refrain from drinking wine.

I know children who smoke. That is because the parents smoke. So let us think like this: we practice not only for ourselves, but for our ancestors, and for our children. We practice as a *bodhisattva* for the sake of everyone; for our society, also. The next morning she took all five precepts.

So let us make a vow, make a determination, to live in such a way that can help so many people. Because when we've got that determination, there is a strong source of energy born in us and that energy will protect us from doing things that are wrong. That source of energy in Buddhism, we call *bodhicitta*, the mind of love, the mind of awakening. It makes you alive, and children, also. They can have a strong mind of love, mind of understanding. I have seen many young people support their parents and help their parents to come back to the practice. So I have faith. I wish today you will discuss a little bit on this. Your insight about the question I proposed five, six days ago was very good, wonderful.

An unhappy person, to make other people happy, to love other people, has to take care of and love himself or herself first. In Plum Village, we offer him, we offer her, the way to breathe, to walk, to stop, to embrace the feeling of pain, of sorrow. Because when you know how to take care of yourself, when you know how to love yourself, then you know how to take care and to love other people. The Buddha said that taking care of yourself, loving oneself, is the basic thing, is the basic condition, for you to take care and to love all living beings. Of course, other people can help you practice, but you have to make efforts by yourself. Peace, happiness, and joy begin with myself and then I will get the support of other people around me. Then, later, I will be a source of support to other people around me.

[Young people] When you hear the bell, please stand up and bow.

[Bell]

Yesterday, we talked a little bit about non-fear. The Buddha knows that there is fear in each one of us. That is why he urges us to touch our fear, to embrace it. Our fear of loneliness, our fear of being abandoned, our fear of growing old, our fear of dying, our fear of being sick, and so on. You have learned that every time we embrace our fear, it will lose some of its strength; otherwise, the blocks of fear will continue to be strong in the depths of our consciousness and continue to shape our behavior.



Non-fear is the true base for true happiness. We have been learning about *dana*, giving, generosity, and non-fear is the kind of gift that is considered to be the best, the most precious. If you can offer non-fear to someone, you offer the best kind of gift. The people who are dying may be very fearful. If you have non-fear with you, you sit with him or with her in that difficult moment of his life. You make him die peacefully without fear. This is a great gift. If you are someone who learns how to accompany the dying person, you have to cultivate your non-fear. Because without non-fear, you cannot be your best in order to help him, or help her.

There are three kinds of gifts spoken about in Buddhism. The first gift is piety. It means material gift. You give that in order to relieve the suffering of the people who are poor, who are destitute concerning the problem of housing, of food, of medicine.

The second kind of gift is the Dharma. With the Dharma, you can help people to relieve a lot of their suffering. You help people to know how to organize their lives, to do things in such a way that they can bring happiness to themselves and to their families, how to transform their suffering, how to love, and to help other people stop suffering.

Finally, the third kind of gift is called non-fear. I would like to tell you the story of a person who lived two thousand six hundred years ago, who was a lay disciple of the Buddha and who practiced giving, generosity, in such a way that he got a lot of happiness. Finally he got himself the gift of non-fear when he died because he died beautifully, peacefully, and his name is Anathapindika.

Anathapindika is one of the early lay disciples of the Buddha. Anathapindika is not his real name. His real name is Sudatta. Anathapindika is the name given to him by the people of his city because he was so generous. He was a businessman. But he wasn't so busy. He had time and energy to bring help to destitute people, the people who are alone. He used a part of his wealth to do the work of giving. It did not seem that he became less rich at all while doing so. He had a lot of friends in the business circle and he was loved by them, quite a lot. He did business with these people and got their trust and continued to help the people in his country a lot.

The first time he saw the Buddha was in the Venuvana. Venuvana means the bamboo grove in the kingdom of Magadha. He had a brother-in-law living in that city, the city of Rajagaha in the Magadha kingdom. He used to come to that city several times a year to do business. He himself lived in the kingdom of Kosala, north of the Ganges River. He had a family there. The capitol of Kosala is Sravasti. So from time to time, he left Sravasti in order to go to Rajagaha. When he was there, he always stayed at his brother-in-law's home.

One day he arrived and it didn't seem that his brother-in-law took good care of him at all, not like other times. His brother-in-law was busy arranging the house as if he was about to invite the king. So he asked the question, "Dear brother, why didn't you take care of me like the other times? What are you doing? Are you inviting the king to the house or something?" And his brother-in-law said, "No, I am not inviting the king. I am inviting the Buddha." He had never heard of the Buddha. The Buddha is just a monk and some of his students.

It was the third year after his enlightenment and the Buddha was teaching in the Bamboo Grove. The Bamboo Grove had been given to him by the king of Magadha, King Bimbisara. There were more than a thousand monks already. Every time I thought of that moment of the career of the Buddha, I always felt a little bit of pity for the Buddha, because to have one thousand two hundred and fifty monks to take care of, that is big business. I am taking care of less than one hundred monks and nuns now, and I know that is not easy.

Sangha building: without big brothers, talented monks like Shariputra, Mollegana, the Buddha couldn't have been able to build a sangha of monks and nuns like he did. It is difficult. Sangha building is what every one of us has to learn. To build a happy sangha is for our support, our happiness. Your family is a sangha, itself. Building a sangha of practice is to build your own safety, your support, your happiness.

When Anathapindika heard the word "Buddha," he was struck, because he never heard such a name. Its a new name. "The Buddha, you mean?" "Yes, the Buddha." "It means the awakened one?" "Yes, it means the awakened one." So suddenly he felt in love with that name, that person. I don't know why. Things happen like that. You hear a name and suddenly you have a lot of sympathy. As if everything had been written before in your heart. And that word Buddha did not leave him?. He wanted to wait until tomorrow to see the Buddha and a number of disciples coming, but he couldn't wait. He had a hard time going to sleep at night. He woke up three or four times during the night thinking that it was already sunrise. Finally, he thought that the sun is rising. They did not have any clock then. He set out and said, "I am going to welcome the Buddha. Maybe I will see him on the street, because I know the way to Venuvana."

This year, a number of us from Plum Village, we sat in Venuvana for lunch with the Indian children just a few months ago. But it was not really the morning. He went alone and he continue to walk until he arrive at Venuvana. It was still very early in the morning. All the monks were still sleeping and it was dark in the bamboo grove. He sat down and suddenly he saw in the fog someone coming, although he did not see very clearly. Finally, he realized that this person may be the Buddha. So they had a few sentences in exchange and he was so happy to meet the Buddha and he recognized in the Buddha his real teacher. So they sat down for a conversation, about a half an hour only, and they love each other. He invited the Buddha to come to his kingdom for a teaching, the kingdom of Kosala.

That day, the Buddha went to the house of his brother-in law. After having lunch, he gave a Dharma discourse and that helped Anathapindika to learn more about the teachings of the Buddha. He was determined to invite the Buddha to come to his country to teach. The next day, toward the end of the day, he asked his brother-in-law to allow him to use his house to make an offering to the Buddha again. He wanted the Buddha to come the next day. After having visited the Buddha a few times, he got the agreement of the Buddha that the Buddha would go to the kingdom of Kosala, the city of Sravasti, to bring the teaching there.

He was so happy . He asked one of the monks to go with him to make the preparation. Shariputra, one of the high monks in the order, agreed to go with him. They set out on foot to go to the kingdom of Kosala. On the way, they spread the news that the Buddha, a great teacher, is coming and you have to prepare yourself in order to welcome him. When they got back to the city of Sravasti, he looked hard to find a piece of land, because he wanted to keep the Buddha in his country. The Buddha is such a jewel. The Buddha may come and teach and may go back to Venuvana, and he wanted the Buddha to stay longer, much longer, in his kingdom.

He was looking very hard for a beautiful place. Finally he found a place, a beautiful park, very close to the city. He found out that the park belonged to Prince Jeta. He visited the prince and asked the prince to sell it to him in order for him to offer it to the Buddha and his congregation. Jeta said "Well, this park is my pleasure. The king has given it to me and I want to keep it for my own pleasure." Anathapindika talks about the Buddha. "If you consent to sell it to me, then I will make it into a beautiful practice center for the Buddha and his monks." And he insisted. Prince Jeta in order to dissuade him said, "Well, if you have enough gold to cover the ground of the park, then I will sell it to you. Anathapindika thought for one or two

minutes and said, "Yes, I will do that. I will have enough gold to cover the park and I will buy it." And then the prince said, "That is a joke. That is a joke. I don't want to sell." But Anathapindika said, "Your excellency, you know that you are the crown prince and anything a person like you says should not be a joke. You have said so and I have agreed." He went and sought advice of a lawyer. Then the lawyer advised Jeta, the prince, to sell it to him because he had made a declaration as a joke.

So finally Anathapindika brought a cart of gold to come and cover the place. They so impressed Prince Jeta. "Who is the Buddha that this person agreed to spend all of his fortune to buy a piece of land for him?" He was so impressed that when the gold was spread about two thirds of the ground he said, "Well, I offer the third part. You don't have to bring any more gold. And I also offer all the trees in the park." That is why nowadays we call it the Anathapindika Park with the Jeta Trees.

Then quickly, he built the monastery. Very quickly, because he had found the object of his true love. He spent a lot of time, energy building the practice center for the Buddha and his monks. Anathapindika took a lot of pleasure serving the Buddha, serving the sangha. His family did not know anything about Buddhism. They had to learn a lot from other teachers. But this time, they were very united as a family. He had three daughters and one son. He also had a young brother named Subbutti. Subbutti later became a very illustrious monk. You learn about him in the *Diamond Sutra*. Subbutti, the one who practice the deep vision on emptiness.

They came to listen to the Dharma talk given by the Buddha at the Jeta Grove every week. The Jeta Grove became a very beautiful and famous practice center. The King of Kosala also came and listened and became a student and a very good friend of the Buddha. The King of Kosala was born in the same year as the Buddha. After he had become a student of the Buddha, he continued to learn and to practice. Finally they became very good, very close friends. You know that the Buddha died at the age of eighty. King Pasenadi of Kosala also died just a few months before the Buddha.

The third daughter of Anathapindika learned Buddhism very well. She practiced very well. She was wedded to a governor of a nearby country called Anga. The daughter introduced the governor to the teaching of the Buddha and he became a very good supporter of the Buddha Dharma, also. Anathapindika's family was a very happy family, and their happiness came from the joy of supporting the Buddha, the Dharma, and the sangha. They were very united with each other.

One day the Buddha learned that Anathapindika was very sick. That was about thirty years later. He went to visit Anathapindika. His beloved lay disciples. Anathapindika said that he has only one thing that he is sorry about. He is very satisfied with his life, his family, his practice. He is only sorry about one thing: that he is too weak to come to the Jeta Grove every week to listen to the Dharma talk. He wanted to be there at every Dharma talk of the Buddha. The Buddha said, "I will send my disciples to you, my disciples are me, to take care of you and help you to practice even if you cannot come to the Jeta Grove." Venerable Shariputra was also a very close friend of Anathapindika. He used to come visit him very often and help him. One morning Shariputra learned that Anathapindika was dying. He thought that maybe this would be his last visit and he asked his younger brother in the Dharma, Ananda, to come along.

When they arrive, Anathapindika could not sit up in his bed. Shariputra said, "No my friend, don't try. Just lay down quietly. We will bring a few chairs close to you and we will be together." The first question he asked is "Dear friend, Anathapindika, how do you feel? Is the pain in your body increasing or has it begun to decrease?" Anathapindika said, "No,

Venerables, the pain in me is not decreasing. It is increasing all the time." There upon, Shariputra proposed that three of them practice together the practice of the recollections of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Shariputra is one of the most intelligent disciples of the Buddha. He knew that Anathapindika received a lot of pleasure every time he served the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. He wanted to water the seeds of happiness in the store consciousness of Anathapindika.

He began to invite Ananda and Anathapindika to breathe in and breathe out and focus their attention on the person of the Buddha, on the virtues of the Buddha. After that, they meditated on the Dharma, the Dharma that can bring relief right away. The moment you begin to practice you get calm, you get transformation right away. If you don't know how to practice mindful breathing, you cannot get the calm and the well-being, but if you know how to practice mindful breathing, mindful walking, you begin to get some calm, some stability right away. The Dharma is something that does not require time, a lot of time. You can touch the Dharma. You can touch the effect of your practice right in this life, right today. The Sangha is a body of practitioners who are always there for you, supporting you every moment. Especially when you need her, the sangha is for you. So after the practice of the recollection on the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, Anathapindika restored the balance. He suffered much less and he was able to smile.

At that time, Shariputra proposed that they continue the practice. They practiced about looking deeply into their six sense organs, the objects of these six senses, and also the consciousnesses that arise from the contact between the six organs and the objects.

In *The Chanting Book of Plum Village*—this is an old version, the new version has been printed in America and will be available in a few months—there is a discourse called *The Teachings to be Given to the Sick*. I would like to invite you to study this discourse. I translated the sutra from the Chinese, but I also consulted an equivalent text in the Pali canon.

Let us practice like this. Breathing in, I know that this body is not me. Breathing out, I feel I am not caught in this body. In fact, they begin with eyes. These eyes are not me. I am not caught by these eyes. Eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—six things. They always begin with eyes. Breathing in, I know that these eyes are not me. I am not caught in these eyes. I am life without boundaries. These eyes have a beginning. These eyes can disintegrate, but I am not caught in these eyes. They begin with the eyes and continue with the nose, the ears, the tongue, the body, and the mind.

Then they switch to the objects of the six senses. These forms are not me. I am not caught in these forms. These sounds are not me. I am not caught in these sounds. Because the dying person may be attached to forms, sounds, body, mind, et cetera, considering these things to be self, considering that they are losing these, they are losing self.

After having meditated on the six senses and their objects and the six kinds of consciousnesses, they begin to meditate on the four elements. Breathing in, I know the element water is in me. Breathing out, I know that the element water is not me. I am not caught in the element of water. When you breathe and you meditate like that, you see that the water is everywhere, around you, inside of you. Water is not you. You are more than water. You are not caught by the element of water.

And you meditate also on the element of heat. The heat in me is not me. I am not caught by the heat in me. The heat is everywhere. You do not consider the heat to be yourself. Breathing in I realize the element of earth in me. Breathing out, I know that I am not the earth. The

element earth is not me and I am not caught in the element called earth. So they continue like that with the elements air, with the four elements.

And they come to the five aggregates we have learned in the last few days: form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness. Breathing in, I know that form is not me. I am not limited by form. Feelings are not me. I am not limited by feelings. Perceptions are not me. I am not caught by the perceptions. Mental formations are not me. I am not these mental formations. Consciousness is not me. I am not caught by this consciousness. Then they practice looking into the nature of causes and conditions?

Anathapindika was practicing because he knows the two monks very well. They are both beloved disciples of the Buddha and are sitting there to support him so he could do the meditation easily. First of all, he meditated in order to restore the balance in him so that the pain in him would not bother him too much. And finally he was concentrated enough in order to follow the other kind of meditation. "Friend Anathapindika, everything that is arises because of causes and conditions. Everything that is has the nature not to be born and not to die, not to arrive and not to depart." These are very deep teachings. When the body arises, it arises. It does not come from anywhere. If conditions are sufficient, the body manifests itself and you perceive it as existing. When the conditions are no longer sufficient, the body is not perceived by you and you may think of it as not existing. In fact, the nature of everything is the nature of no-birth and no-death. Shariputra was giving the best teaching of the Buddha to Anathapindika in this very critical moment of his life. Everything that is comes to be because of a combination of causes. When the causes and conditions are sufficient, the body is present. When the causes and conditions are not sufficient, the body is absent. The same is true with ears, nose, eyes, tongue, and mind; form, sound, smell, taste, touch and so on.

These lines may be a little bit abstract to you, but it is possible for all of us to get a deep understanding, a deep experience of it. You have to know the true nature of death, the true nature of dying, in order to understand really the true nature of living. If you don't understand what is death, you don't understand what is life, also. Therefore, it is very important to know the nature of birth and death. The teaching of the Buddha is to relieve us of suffering and the base of suffering is ignorance, ignorance about the true nature of yourself, of things around you. Since you don't understand, you are too afraid and fear has brought you a lot of suffering. That is why the offering of non-fear is the best kind of offering you can make to someone.

[Bell]

We have ideas. We talk about it, but we may not have a real understanding of the words we use, the ideas we have. In our mind, to die means from some one you suddenly become no one. You cease to be. You cease to exist. That is our understanding. In the same way, we think of birth as our beginning. What does it mean to be born? To be born means from nothing, you suddenly become something. From no one, you suddenly become someone. That is our definition of birth and death. Because of these notions, we have kept our fear in us for too long. The Buddha invites us to bring our fear up and look deeply into the object of our fear: fear of dying, fear of non-being. That is the cream of the Buddha's teaching. You cannot afford not to learn it because this is the best thing in the teaching of the Buddha.

There are many non-Buddhists who have discovered the reality of no-birth and no-death. Let us talk about, for instance, the French scientist Lavoisier. He looked deeply into the nature of things and he declared that nothing is born and nothing can die: "*Rien ne se crée, rien ne se perd.*" I don't think that he had studied Buddhist sutras.

Suppose we tried to practice with a sheet of paper because a sheet of paper is what we call a thing. Let us practice together like Anathapindika, Shariputra, and Ananda, looking deeply into this sheet of paper. You may think that the sheet of paper has a birthday and will have a day of dying. We may imagine a day when the piece of paper is produced from nothing, it suddenly becomes something, a sheet of paper. Is it possible? When you look into the sheet of paper in this very moment, you don't have to go back to someday. Just look at it in the present moment. Into the true nature of the paper you see what? You see that the piece of paper is made of non-paper elements. This is a very scientific way of looking, because you don't accept anything that is not evident.

When I touch the sheet of paper, I touch the tree, the forest, because I know that deep inside there is the existence of the trees, the forest. If you return the element tree back to the forest, the sheet of paper cannot be here. Right? I also touch the sunshine. Even at midnight touching the sheet of paper, I touch sunshine. Because sunshine is one element called non-paper elements that has made up the paper. Because without sunshine, no tree can grow. So touching the tree, I touch the sunshine.

I touch the cloud. There is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. You don't have to be a poet to see the cloud in a sheet of paper. Because without a cloud, there would be no rain and no forest can grow. So the cloud is in there. The trees are in there. The sunshine, the minerals from the earth, the earth, time, space, people, insects—everything in the cosmos seem to be existing in this sheet of paper. If you look deeply, you find that everything in the cosmos is present in this moment in the sheet of paper. If you send one of these elements back to its source, the paper would not be there. That is why it is very important to see that a sheet of paper is made of, only of, non-paper elements. Our body is like that also.

So is it possible to say that from nothing, something has come into existence? From nothing, can you have something? No. Because before we perceive it as a sheet of paper, it had been sunshine. It had been trees. It had been clouds. The paper hasn't come from nothing: *Rien ne se crée*. Nothing has been created. The day you believe to be the birthday of the sheet of paper is something we call a continuation day. Before that day, it had been something else, many things even, and on that day it was perceived as a sheet of paper. So the next time, when you celebrate your birthday, instead of singing happy birthday, you sing happy continuation day. We have done that to a number of friends. Happy continuation day.

The true nature of this sheet of paper, is the nature of no-birth: *Rien ne se crée, rien ne se perd*. Our true nature is also the nature of no-birth. Our birth certificate is misleading. It was certified that we were born on that day from such and such hospital or city. We accepted to begin to be on that day, but we know very well that we had been there in the womb of our mother long before that. From nothing, how can you become something? From no one, how can you become someone? Even before the day of your conception in your mother, you had been there. In your father, in your mother, and everywhere else, also. So if you try to go back, you cannot find a beginning of you. You have been there for a long time and everywhere.

People think they can eliminate what they don't want: they can burn, they can kill. But it's not by destroying that they can reduce something to nothing. They killed Mahatma Gandhi. They shot Martin Luther King. But these people continue to be among us in many forms and their being continues. Their spirit continues.

Let us now try to eliminate this sheet of paper. Let us try to burn it to see whether we are capable of making it into nothing. Anyone has a match? I have the element water, but I don't have the element fire, so I am calling for the element fire. Please follow your breathing. Observe to see if it is possible to reduce something to nothing.

Ash is what you can see. If you have observed, you see that some smoke has come up and that is a continuation of the sheet of paper. Now the sheet of paper has become part of a cloud in the sky. You may meet it again tomorrow in the form of a raindrop on your forehead. But maybe you will not be mindful and you will not know that this is a meeting. You may think that the raindrop is foreign to you, but it may just be the sheet of paper into which you have practiced looking deeply. The way it is now, is it nothing? No, I don't think the sheet of paper has become nothing. Part of it has become the cloud. You can say, "Goodbye, see you again one day in one form or another."

It is very difficult to follow the path of a sheet of paper. It is as difficult as to find God. Some heat has penetrated into my body. I almost burned my fingers. It has penetrated into your body, also. It has gone very far. If you have fine equipment you could measure the impact of the heat even from a distant star. Because the impact of a small thing on the whole cosmos can be measured. It has produced some change in my organism, in your organism, and in the cosmos, also. The sheet of paper continues to be there, present. It is difficult for our conceptual eyes to see and discern but we know that it is always there and everywhere, also. And this little amount of ash may be returned to the earth later on. Maybe next year when you come back to Plum Village, you will see it in the form of a little flower or part of a plum leaf. We don't know. But we do know that nothing died. Nothing has become nothingness. So the true nature of the sheet of paper is no-death.

Looking deeply into our self, our body, our feelings, our perceptions. Looking into the mountains, the rivers, to another person, we have to be able to see, to touch the nature of no-birth and no-self in them. This is one of the practices that are very important in the Buddhist tradition.

In the teaching, you may distinguish two dimensions of reality. The first dimension is called historical dimension and the second dimension is called ultimate dimension. We should be able to touch both dimensions if we have enough concentration and mindfulness. Mindfulness and concentration cultivated by our daily practice must be used to look deeply into the nature of what is there.

When we look into the ocean, we can see the waves, different kinds of waves. Some are very big; some are very small. It seems that each wave has its private existence, its birth and its death. A wave can have a lot of complexes. I am smaller than you. I am less important than you. You are more beautiful than me. My life is short. I will no longer be here in a few minutes, a few seconds, and things like that. Ideas like beginning, end, high, low, more beautiful, less beautiful, being here, not being here, all these ideas are assaulting the wave all the time. It cannot live its life as a wave in a peaceful happy way. We are very much the same. We are assailed by so many ideas including the ideas of birth and death, the idea of being and non-being, and we are scared. We get scared. Because of that fear, true happiness is not possible. So deep looking helps us to remove the fear.

According to the teachings, everything that is there is of the nature of no-birth and no-death. When conditions are sufficient, they appear to you. You have a perception of it and you say "This is." When one of the conditions is not there and you cannot perceive it, you say "It is not there." That is non-being. You are caught by the idea of being and non-being. When you see it differently, when you see it for the first time in a form that you have not seen before, you think that it has been born. When you don't recognize it anymore, you cannot have the same kind of perception, you say that "It has died." That is why we have to learn to look deeply in order to touch the realm of no ideas, no perceptions.

In Buddhism, there is a word that upsets many people. That is *nirvana*. Nirvana means extinction. Touching nirvana is the purpose of our practice. But a good question may be asked: extinction of what? It is like the word emptiness. The word emptiness is also very scary because it can provoke the feeling of non-being. Annihilation. Nothingness. We have to learn what words like nirvana or emptiness really mean. One of the best ways is to ask questions. “Dear Buddha, what do you mean? Emptiness? Empty of what? What do we mean by extinction? Extinction of what?”

Extinction first means extinction of ideas, like ideas of birth and death, being and non-being. When you practice looking deeply into the nature of a wave, you have a chance to find out that a wave is made of water. While this is a wave, it is at the same time water. It is possible for a wave to live its life as a wave, and to live its life as the life of water at the same time. This is important. As a wave, she thinks that she has a beginning and an end, high, low, being, and non-being. She thinks that before this, non-being, and after this, non-being. And this is her life span and she is a separate entity. If we look deeply, we see that this wave is made of all the other waves. If we study deeply, we see that the movements of all other waves have combined to make this wave possible. In this wave, you can touch all the other waves. It's like when you touch the sheet of paper, you touch all the other non-paper elements in it. So what the wave would call itself is really made of non-self elements. So the idea of a self is an idea to be removed in order for you to touch reality. The self is made of non-self elements. The moment when you realize that, you lose all your fear.

This body is not me. These eyes are not me. I am not caught by these eyes. So if you identify yourself with this life span, if you identify yourself with that hate, and if you imagine that you are separated from everything, you are not this, you are wrong, because you are everything at the same time. The wave while living the life of a wave may like to bend down and touch her true nature, the nature of water. All these ideas, beginning, end, high, low, this, that, more or less beautiful, all these ideas can be applied somehow to the wave, but they cannot be applied to water. So wave and all these ideas can be described as the historical dimension and water can be described as the ultimate dimension. And you have your ultimate dimension. Your ultimate dimension is the dimension of no-birth and no-death. Because we cannot talk about water in terms of beginning, end, high, low, like the way you talk about a wave.

*Sunyata*, emptiness, is a very important term in Buddhism. Very misleading, also. If you look deeply into this sheet of paper, you see that it is full. It is full of everything in the cosmos: the sunshine, the trees, the clouds, the earth, the minerals, everything. Except for one thing. It is empty of one thing only—a separate self. The sheet of paper cannot be by itself alone. It has to interbe with everything else in the cosmos. That is why the word interbe can be more helpful than the word to be. To be means to interbe. The sheet of paper cannot be without sunshine, cannot be without the forest. The sheet of paper has to interbe with the sunshine, to interbe with the forest. To be together—that is the real meaning of interdependent coproduction.

If you ask how the world comes into existence, into being, the Buddha would say in very simple terms: "This is because that is. This is not because that is not." Because the sunshine is, the sheet of paper is. Because the tree is, the sheet of paper is. You cannot be by yourself, alone. You have to interbe with everything else in the cosmos. That is the nature of interbeing. I don't think that this word is in the dictionary, but I believe that it will be there soon, because it is helpful to see the real nature of things, the nature of interbeing

Emptiness means the absence of a separate self. If you are locked into the idea of a separate self, you have great fear. But if you look and you are capable of seeing “you” everywhere, you lose that fear. I have practiced as a monk. I have practiced looking deeply every day. I



don't just give Dharma talks. I can see me in my students. I can see me in my ancestors. I can see my continuation everywhere in this moment. I have not been able to go back to my country in the past thirty years. I went out in order to call for peace, to stop the killing, and I was not allowed to go home by many succeeding governments. Yet, I feel that I am there, very real. Many new students of monks and nuns have come up. I have not seen them directly, but they have learned from me through books, tapes, and other disciples who have gone to Vietnam. I don't have that kind of painful feeling of a person being in exile because many friends of mine go to Vietnam and they feel my presence there even stronger than in other countries, including France. I see myself in my students. Every effort I make every day is to transmit the best that I have received from my teachers, from my practice, to my students. That is done with love.

I don't think that I will cease to be someday. I told my friends that the twenty-first century is a hill, a beautiful hill, and we shall be climbing together as a sangha and I will be with them all the way, true. So for me that is not a problem because I have seen everyone in me, me in everyone. That is the practice of looking deeply, the practice of emptiness, the practice of interbeing.

Anathapindika was learning and practicing these teachings in the last moments of his life. Suddenly, Ananda saw Anathapindika cry. He felt sorry for the lay person. He said, "Dear friend why are you crying? Did you regret anything? Do you regret anything? Did you fail in your practice?" Anathapindika said, "No, Lord Ananda, I don't regret anything. I am so happy and I practice so well. It is wonderful to practice with your presence here supporting me. Well, I practice very well." "Why do you cry then?" "I cry because I am so moved. I have been a supporter of the Buddha and the Sangha for more than thirty years, but I have never learned and practiced a teaching that is wonderful like this." He was so happy the last moment of his life. He suddenly got the greatest gift he ever got—no fear. Ananda said "Dear friend, you don't know, but this kind of teaching, we monks and nuns receive almost every day." Anathapindika said, "Lord Ananda, I have a request. My last request. Please go home and tell Lord Buddha that although many of us are too busy in our lay life, there are those of us who are capable of receiving and have the time to practice this wonderful teaching. Please tell the Lord to dispense this teaching to us, also, the lay people." Ananda agreed to do so. And that was the last statement made by the lay person, Anathapindika.

The story you can read in *The Teachings to be Given to the Sick*. I wish that you have the time to take care of this very important practice, the practice of non-fear, the practice of looking deeply to relieve in yourself the deep fear that is always there. If you have non-fear in you, your life will be more beautiful, happier, and you can help many people. Non-fear has an energy as a base for social action, for actions of compassion, to protect people, to protect the earth, to satisfy your needs to love and to serve. Non-fear is very important.

Omega Institute is a place where we shall be leading a retreat for one thousand people this Fall. I had been there several times. Omega is a place in the northern part of New York state. One day I was going there for a retreat with Sister Chan Khong and a number of friends. We learned that our friend, Alfred Hassler, was dying in a hospital on the way. So we decided to stop and to visit Alfred. He had been a very strong supporter for peace in Vietnam—for ending the war in Vietnam. I came out of Vietnam to call for peace and I made a lot of friends in Europe and in America while working to end the war in Vietnam. Alfred Hassler was one of the friends who strongly supported that effort. He was then director of a peace organization called Fellowship of Reconciliation.

When we arrived in the hospital, he was being fed with serum glucose and he was in a coma. His daughter, Laura, was there. Laura had helped us in the Buddhist Peace Delegation in Paris

contacting other peace delegations in the Paris peace talks. And Dorothy, his wife, was there. When they saw us, they were so happy. They did not dream that we could make our way to the place where Alfred was dying.

Laura tried to wake Alfred up, but she could not. Alfred was in a deep coma. I think that the hospital was trying their best to help him. He was in a very difficult state. I decided to ask Sister Chan Khong to sing to Alfred a song I wrote using words from a sutra: "This body is not me. I am not caught by this body. I am life without boundaries. I have never been born. I will never die. Look at me. Look at the stars and the moon. All of them are me, are manifestations of me. So smile to me, take my hand, say goodbye that we will see each other right away after this. We will see each other in every walk of life. We will recognize each other again and again, everywhere." Sister Chan Khong began to sing this song.

After she finished singing for the second time, Alfred came back. He woke up. It was like a miracle. Please don't think that if someone is in a coma, he is not there or she is not there. She is there in a certain way. If you are to accompany a dying person, you have to be there also—to be there body and mind united in mindfulness, solid without fear. And you have to talk to him, to sing to him or to her, because there is a way that person can hear you. This is very true in many circumstances. Don't just sit there. Talk to him. Talk to her. Sing to him. Tell stories. This is my experience. Many people come back, wake up because of that.

Laura was so happy. She said "Alfred." She called her father. "Alfred," she said, "Do you know that Thay is here? Do you know that Sister Chan Khong is here?" Alfred could not talk, but his eyes proved that he was aware that we were there. Sister Chan Khong began to talk to him, recalling the experiences that we had had working together to stop the war in Vietnam. "Alfred, do you remember that day you were visiting the monk, Tri Quang in Anh Quan Temple? The United States had just given the order to bomb Hanoi and Thay Tri Quang refused to see any westerners, pacifist or not. He didn't want to see you and you sat outside and you slipped in a sheet of paper and you said, 'I will not live until you see me. I will go on a fast'. I am a pacifist. I have come for you, for the people of Vietnam, and not to support the bombing in Hanoi.' And fifteen minutes later, the Venerable opened the door and with a broad smile invited you. Do you remember that, Alfred? "

"Alfred, do you remember the time we organized a peace demonstration in Rome? There were three hundred Catholic priests wearing the names of three hundred Buddhist monks in the jail of Vietnam because these monks refused to be drafted into the army. Remember these things?" In fact, she was doing exactly the things that Shariputra was doing to Anathapindika. Watering the seeds of happiness, because Alfred got a lot of happiness working for peace. When you are able to do something for the cause of your life, you are happy.

During that time, I was doing massage to Alfred's feet. Because when you die, you may get a little bit numb and you don't have the feeling that your body is there. So it is very helpful to massage him or her. "Alfred do you know that Thay is massaging your feet?" And Alfred, although he could not say anything, his eyes proved that he was aware. We continued like that for five, seven minutes. And suddenly, suddenly, Alfred opened his mouth and pronounced a word. "Wonderful. Wonderful." Two times. And after that he sank back into a coma. We waited for a half hour or more and we have to go to the retreat in Omega.

Before leaving, I told Dorothy, his wife, and Laura, his daughter, to continue the practice—talking to him, singing to him, evoking the good memories. I had to give an orientation talk that night. Early in the morning, I got the news that Alfred passed away just a few hours after we left, peacefully, without pain. It's wonderful to have friends who understand you and support you in this difficult moment. It's wonderful to be able to be there for your friend in

this very difficult moment, but you have to cultivate so that you'll be solid, you'll be without fear. Because that is the best way that you can help the other person.

This teaching of the Buddha about non-fear, about no-birth and no-death is the cream of the whole body of the teaching. You have come to Plum Village in order to learn techniques to get more solidity, to transform some of your sufferings. Yes, that is good, but don't miss the opportunity. This is a kind of invitation for you to go deeper, to learn, and to practice so that you become someone who has a great capacity for being solid, calm, without fear, because our society needs people like you who have these qualities. And your children, our children, need people like this in order to go on.

It's forty-four minutes after noon. So we shall have a walking meditation after this. After fifteen minutes of break, we will have a formal lunch a little bit late today. Everyone is invited to the formal lunch. This is to show you how they practice in Buddhist monasteries during retreat. We make the ritual very short—reduce it to the minimum—for you to have a taste. It may be a great joy to participate in such a meal. You see the monks and nuns in their orange robes, holding their bowls. Please participate in all the lunch. We will eat in such a way that peace, joy, and stability will be possible during the time of eating. It is a real practice. From the time you hold the bowl and look into the bowl, you begin already to practice. When you fill the bowl with the food, you also practice mindful breathing. There are many *gatas*, short poems, for you to breathe along with so that you dwell in mindfulness. You just look at the brothers and sisters, the monastic people and the Tiep Hien people in order to see how they do it. Because the practice is to be mindful in every moment. When you have gotten your food, you practice walking meditation to this hall and you sit down. You place the bowl or the plate in front of you and you begin to practice sitting meditation. Not waiting. Waiting is not a practice.

Enjoy your sitting. Enjoy your breathing. Enjoy the collective energy of the sangha. The monks and the nuns have wooden spoons so that they can eat very, very quietly without producing any noise. Unfortunately we don't have wooden spoons for everyone, so do your best not to produce noise and you will feel the atmosphere of the monastery. Every movement of your spoon, of your fork, should be mindful. You chew your food slowly and you become aware of what you are eating. During the meal, become aware of the food. Each morsel of food is an ambassador coming from the whole cosmos just like the sheet of paper. Chew thirty times and be aware of what you are chewing. Don't chew your sorrow, your projects, your worries—just enjoy the food and pay attention also to the community of brothers and sisters around you. Just two objects of your mindfulness: the food and the community of practice.

There will be some chanting—not too much. The monks and nuns, they have their traditional bowls. They will hold the bowl with this mudra. Two fingers to support the bowl and three fingers to keep it from falling. Like this. And with the other hand, they practice the mudra of peace. They hold the bowl like this and they chant and offer the food to all the Buddhas in the cosmos, all the *bodhisattvas* in the present moment who are everywhere in the world trying to relieve suffering. During that time, their spoon is stuck into the food with the concave face outward.

Then after the chanting, I think about two minutes or less, there will be an offering to share the food with other living beings. This is a symbol. A small quantity of food will be put in a small bowl like this with water. Then everyone will do the concentration in order to touch all living beings who need the food to survive. We pour our compassion, our understanding, into the food. Then one novice will go to a window and chant a *gata* of four lines inviting all living beings to come and receive the food. That is to nourish the compassion in us. The tradition

began at the time of the Buddha. Every time they ate, they always put aside a little bit of their food to share with the animals and the insects around them.

Then we will practice the five contemplations. We enjoy our meal silently and mindfully and you will feel the spirit of fellowship, sisterhood, while of eating. So please join us, especially those of you who have not had this experience. This will be very rewarding.

## Healing is Possible through Resting

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 30, 1997 in Plum Village, France.

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Good morning, my dear friends.

Welcome to the third week of our summer opening. Today is the thirtieth of July 1997, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We have been practicing pebble meditation during the past two weeks, and I hope that the children who just arrived yesterday and today will continue with our practice of the six pebbles. There are children who have been here for the last two weeks, and they will show you how to practice pebble meditation. You'll have to make a small bag like this, and find six pebbles like this, little pebbles. Wash them very carefully, dry them, and put them into the bag.

Today we will learn a short poem together, young people and also less young people. We are going to use the pebbles to practice the poem also. It would be wonderful if you can memorize the short poem in order to practice. Many of you know it by heart already, but there may be a few of you who have not been introduced to the practice of this poem: "In, out. Deep, slow. Calm, ease. Smile, release. Present moment, wonderful moment." I guess most of us can sing it already. Shall we sing?

In, out.  
Deep, slow.  
Calm, ease.  
Smile, release.  
Present moment,  
Wonderful moment.

This is a wonderful poem, because every time you practice it you'll feel much better within your body and your mind. When you are angry, when you are worried, when you suffer, if you know how to practice that poem then you will feel much better right away after one or two minutes.

I am going to remind you of the way to practice. First, "in" and "out." It means that when I breathe in, I know I am breathing in. It's easy. And when I breathe out, I know I am breathing out. I don't mix the two things up. Breathing in, I know it is my in-breath. Breathing out, I know this is my out-breath. By that time, you stop all the thinking, you just pay attention to your in-breath and your out-breath. You are 100 percent with your in-breath and your out-breath.

It is like holding a baby in such a way that you hold it with 100 percent of yourself. Suppose this is a baby and I hold the baby like this. I hold the baby with 100 percent of myself. Remember, there are times when your mother holds you like this. Have you seen the image of the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus? She holds him like that: 100 percent. So here, our in-breath is our baby, and we hold our in-breath 100 percent. "Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in." You just embrace your in-breath, nothing else. Don't think of anything else. That is the secret of success.

When you breathe in, you just breathe in, you do nothing else. Do you think you can do that? I am asking the adults also, do you think you can do that? Just embrace your in-breath with 100 percent of yourself—mind and body together. And when you breathe out, you embrace

your out-breath. You identify your in-breath as your in-breath, because when I hold my baby I know this is my baby, not something else. So, “in, out” means, “breathing in I know this is my in-breath, breathing out, I know this is my out-breath.” It’s very simple, but it’s wonderful. I am sure that if you try it, after two or three in-breaths and out-breaths you will feel much better already. I can guarantee it because I have done it and I always feel wonderful.

If you are about to cry, if you are about to kick or hit someone else because of your anger, and if you know how to go back to yourself and practice “in, out” for three times, I am sure that you’ll be different. You will not cry, you will not kick, you will not punch because you are a much better person after the practice of “in, out.” Today, try and you’ll see the power of the practice.

Then after you have practiced “In, out” three, four, or five times, you’ll feel that your in-breath has become deeper and your out-breath becomes slower. Because when you are angry, when you are in despair, when you suffer, your in-breath and out-breath are very short and not calm at all. But then after having breathed in and out peacefully, your in-breath will be very smooth. Your out-breath, also. So the quality of your breathing has been improved. Your in-breath is deeper and calmer, your out-breath is also deeper and calmer. That is why we can practice “deep and slow.”

Breathing in, I know that my in-breath has become deeper, and the deeper it is, the more pleasant it becomes. Try to practice breathing in for a few times and you’ll see that it is deeper. And when it is deeper, you’ll feel a lot of pleasure. When you breath out, you say, “Breathing out, I know my out-breath has become slower, slower, more peaceful.” If your breath is deeper, you are deeper. If your breath is slower, you are slower. It means you are more peaceful. So, breathing in, I know that my breath has become deeper. Breathing out, I know that my breathing has become slower. It’s wonderful.

You might use your pebbles also. If you are practicing sitting meditation, you put the pebbles on your left, you bow to the pebbles, and you pick up a pebble with two fingers. One pebble. You look at it and you put it in the palm of your left hand and you begin to practice breathing in, breathing out. “In, out.” The practice is smooth. “In, out.” Once more. “In, out.” You’ll feel much better. Then, I use my two fingers to take the pebble up and I put it on my right side. I have practiced “In, out” already.

Now, I’d like to practice, “Deep, slow.” So, I take another pebble. I look at it. I put it in my left hand and I begin to practice. “Deep, slow.” It has become deeper by itself, you don’t have to make it deeper. It has become deeper by itself alone because you have practiced already three times “In, out.” That is why your breath becomes deeper naturally, and slower. Let us practice together “Deep, slow” three times. “Deep, slow” [pause for three breaths]. Good, we have finished with “Deep, slow. We pick up the pebble and put it on our right side.

Now we practice the third line, “Calm, ease.” It means, “Breathing in, I feel calm. Breathing out, I feel I take everything at ease.” This exercise is very wonderful to practice, especially when you are nervous, when you are angry, when you don’t feel peaceful in yourself. Quick, quick! You have to go back to your in-breath and out-breath and practice “Calm, ease.”

This is an exercise given by the Buddha himself in a sutra called *Anapanasati Sutra, The Sutra on Mindful Breathing*. “Breathing in, I calm the mental formations in me. Breathing out, I let go.” I let go of my anger. I calm my anger, I calm my worries, I calm my jealousy. And I let go of my anger, I let go of my jealousy. I think that adults have to practice together with the children. Every time the child is angry then her mother or her father should take her hand

and invite her to practice. “Calm, ease.” “Let us, together, practice calming and easing. ‘Breathing in, I calm myself. Breathing out, I let go’” at least three times and you will feel much better.

You can begin right away with “Calm, ease” or you might begin in a classical way with “In, out” first and then “Deep, slow” and then “Calm, ease.” Either way is good. The Buddha dharma is wonderful. The moment you take the dharma up and practice you begin to feel better right away. And as you continue the practice, your quality of being always continues to improve.

I propose to you to practice three times ‘Calm, ease’ but no one prevents you from practicing more than that: four times, five times, six times, if you like it. I think you will like it because it makes you suffer less. And if you can practice eight times, ten times, you’ll feel much better. “Calm, ease.”

Then you’ll come to the fourth pebble, and that is “Smile, release. Smile, release.” “Breathing in, I smile.” You can smile now. You may feel it is very difficult to smile, too difficult to smile. But after having practiced three or four times you feel that you are able to smile. And if you can smile, you’ll feel a lot better. You may protest, “Thay, I have no joy in me, why do you want me to smile? That’s not natural.” Many people ask me like that, not only children, but grownup people. They protest, “Thay, I have no joy in me. I cannot force myself to smile, it would not be true, it would not be natural.”

I always say that a smile can be a practice, a kind of yoga practice. Yoga of the mouth: you just smile even if you don’t feel joy and you’ll see after you smile that you’ll feel differently. Sometimes the mind takes the initiative and sometimes you have to allow the body to take the initiative.

Sometimes the spirit leads, and sometimes the body can lead. This is why when you have joy, you naturally smile. But sometimes you can allow the smile to go first. You try to smile and suddenly you feel that you don’t suffer that much any more. So don’t discriminate against the body. The body also can be a leader, not only the spirit. I propose that you try this when you wake up during the night. It’s totally dark. Breath in and smile, and you’ll see. Smile to life. You are alive, you smile. This is not a diplomatic smile, because no one sees you smiling. Yet the smile is a smile of enlightenment, of joy—the joy you feel of being alive.

So smiling is a practice, a yoga practice. Don’t say, “I have no joy, why do I have to smile?” Because when you have joy and you smile, that is not practice, that’s very natural. When you don’t have joy and you smile, that is a real practice. You know there are something like 300 muscles, small and big on your face. Every time we get very angry or worried all these muscles are very tight. When people look at you with that tension on your face, they don’t see you like a flower. People are afraid of you when all the muscles on your face are tense like that. You look more like a bomb than a flower. But if you know how to smile, in just one second, all these muscles are relaxed and your face looks like a flower again. It’s wonderful.

So we have to learn to smile and then we’ll look presentable right away. Look into the mirror and practice, and you’ll see that the practice of the smile is very important. It brings relaxation and you can let go. You feel that you are released from the grip of the anger, of the despair.

[Bell]

On my right, there are already four pebbles. Now I’d like to practice the fifth pebble. This is the most wonderful practice. The fifth pebble can bring you a lot of joy, a lot of

enlightenment, a lot of delight. That is “Present moment, wonderful moment. Present moment, wonderful moment.”

This is a very deep teaching of the Buddha. The Buddha said that it is possible to live happily right here and right now. We don’t have to go to the future. We don’t have to go elsewhere to be happy. We can be happy right here and right now. You don’t need more conditions to be happy, you have enough conditions to be happy right here and right now. If we know how to be ourselves and to look inside and around ourselves, we see that we have had enough conditions to be happy. That is the practice of living happily in the present moment.

When you breathe in, you feel that you are alive. Life is available to you, now: the blue sky, the white cloud, the green vegetation, the birds singing. Plum Village is here. Many friends are here. Your daddy is still alive, your mommy is with you, your brother is there, your sister is there. You have strong feet. You can run. You have eyes that can help you to see everything. There are many conditions for your happiness, you don’t need anything else, you can be happy right away. You stop running. That is the practice. Because there are people who run all of their lives; they run because they think that happiness is not possible in the here and the now.

So this is a wonderful teaching of the Buddha. You breath in and you say “Present moment.” It means, “I establish myself in the present moment. I don’t run any more.” This is the practice of *samata*, stopping. Stop running. I am wonderful like this in my sitting position or my walking position or even in my lying down position. It’s wonderful like that, I don’t need to run any more. Stopping. Present moment, wonderful moment. It’s wonderful that you are alive.

To be alive, that is a miracle. Imagine a person who is already dead. You might not have seen a dead person but maybe you have seen a dead bird, a dead animal. No matter what you do, the animal cannot come back to life. Whatever you do, whatever you say, the animal is not able to listen, to hear. A dead person is also like that. She lies on the bed and no matter what you do, you cannot revive her. You cannot bring her into life again. You cry, you beat your chest, you pull your hair. But that person is already dead.

So, when you look at yourself, you see you are still alive. You see the person you love is still alive. That is wonderful. You have to wake up to that fact. The teaching of the Buddha is the teaching of waking up, waking up to see that all these wonderful things are still available. So you stop running, you establish yourself in the present moment. “Breathing in, I am in the here and in the now. Present moment. Breathing out, I feel this is a wonderful, wonderful moment.”

The Buddha said life is available only in the present moment. The past is gone, the future is not yet here, you have only one moment to be alive. That is the present moment. So simple and so deep. You have an appointment with life. You should not miss that appointment. Life is most precious. You’ve got to meet her, you’ve got to be with her. And you know something, life is only available in the here and the now, in the present moment. So don’t miss your appointment with life. Don’t miss the present moment. That is why the fifth practice is wonderful. If you practice like that, you get a lot of joy whether you are on your cushion or on your bed or in the position of walking meditation. “Present moment, wonderful moment.”

Now I would like to ask you to sing and I will practice. I practice for you. I will practice breathing in and out and I enjoy for you. Okay.



[The community sings: “In, out. Deep, slow. Calm, ease. Smile, release. Present moment, wonderful moment.”]

I think by now, everyone knows the gatha by heart. I would like to tell you that this gatha is also good for practicing walking meditation. We shall do walking meditation after the talk and you may like to walk peacefully and happily with this poem. You breathe in and you make two steps. You say, ‘In, in.’ Then you breath out and you make another two steps, “Out, out.” That is walking meditation. You don’t do anything else. Your mind and your body are totally for the breathing in, the breathing out, and the making of steps. You are perfectly concentrated in walking and breathing, you are not concerned with other things. And you can continue with “In, out” like that for a few minutes. If you want to walk a little bit quicker, you can make three steps while breathing in and breathing out.

You do it very naturally, in such a way that you get a lot of pleasure. Don’t be so serious, so solemn. You do it very, very, very naturally. “In, in, out, out.” If you enjoy walking, you feel wonderful. You are doing the practice correctly. After some time, you switch into ‘Deep, slow.’ “Deep, deep, slow, slow. Deep, deep, slow, slow.” Very concentrated. And we shall be walking with you. Everyone is concentrated. Everyone is peaceful. Everyone is joyful. The energy of joy and of peace will radiate from each person, and if we walk in the sangha like that, we will receive the collective energy and it will be very, very strong.

There is still one pebble left. But for this gatha we don’t need all six pebbles, we need only five. After you have practiced five gathas, your sitting meditation is done. So you hear the sound of the bell, you collect your pebble, and you put it in your small bag.

Do you think my small bag is beautiful? I like this color very much. If you want to have your bag in yellow or orange, you are welcome. Make a very beautiful pebble bag for your meditation because you are going to practice using it here. And when you go home you’ll continue to use your pebble meditation bag. If the adults want to imitate, they are welcome. It’s wonderful. There are those of us who have rosaries—108—and the use of the rosary is exactly like the use of the pebbles. But I think this way is fun.

So, please, young people, I think today you have a lot of things to do. Do them joyfully. I hope the children who have been here for one or two weeks will transmit the teaching of the pebble meditation to the newer children and then we will practice together. Now, when you hear the bell, please stand up and bow to the sangha before you go out and continue the practice.

[Bell]

I would like to give a little bit more instruction about [conscious breathing]. Don’t try to breathe in. Don’t make any effort of breathing in. It is very important. Allow yourself to breathe in naturally. You breathe in any way, why do you have to make a determination to breathe in? That is the point. Allow yourself to breathe in normally. Only pay attention to your in-breath. Don’t say, “My in-breath, come here, I will tell you how to do it.” No. You allow yourself to breathe in, that’s all. Short or long, you allow it to be the way it is. Be completely non-violent while holding your baby. Don’t force your baby to be like this or to be like that, allow it to be as it is. Embrace it only with your mindfulness. It is very important.

When you love someone, you allow him to be or allow her to be. Don’t say, “If you don’t do this, I will not love you.” This is already the practice of love. Allow your in-breath to be itself. Just embrace it with the energy of mindfulness. “Breathing in, I am aware that I am breathing in.” That’s all. The impact will be great.

Many people practice like they are in a hard labor camp. You force yourself, you make too much effort, and you tire yourself out after some time. If you know how to allow yourself to rest, to allow your in-breath and your out-breath to flow in and out naturally, you will never get tired. You only need to light up your mindfulness and to be aware of it. Like when you turn on the light, you just turn on the light. And because of the light you are aware that the bell is there, your friend is there. Awareness is like that. So you recognize your in-breath as an in-breath, your out-breath as your out-breath, and you embrace them with love.

Then in no time at all, their quality of being will be improved. Like a suffering baby who is kicking, is crying, is vibrating. You don't say, "Now, stop, don't cry, don't be agitated!" You don't say this. You don't do anything; you don't intervene. You don't force it to be the way you want. Just pick up the baby and embrace it with all your being. When you have the energy of tenderness, of love and of care, that energy will naturally penetrate into the baby and there will be a transformation. Many of you have been a mother or a father and you know this. Just hold the baby with your tenderness, with your whole presence. And that whole presence, body and mind concentrated we call mindfulness (and you are capable of being mindful, you know). So you cultivate your mindfulness so that you will be mindful more, to be there for your suffering, for yourself, for your beloved one.

In sitting meditation you do like that also. Don't struggle in order to sit. Allow yourself to sit in a relaxed way. "Smile, release." Remember, there was a time when you'd sit in your living room watching television? You could sit for one hour, even two hours? And you didn't complain that you had pain in your shoulders or arms. You just allow yourself to sit. Sitting meditation is not a struggle. If you take it to be a struggle, you'll be tired. After fifteen minutes you'll feel pain in your shoulders and in your head. So, allow yourself to rest. When you practice sitting meditation, walking meditation, allow yourself to rest. It is possible to rest while practicing walking meditation, sitting meditation, mindful breathing. In fact, this practice I offer to you as a means of resting.

Many of us take vacations. But during the time of the vacation we don't know how to rest. Then after the vacation, we are more tired. So, we now allow ourselves to rest our body and our spirit. Here, we are learning the art of resting. Meditation as the practice of resting.

Our body has the capacity of healing itself. You know that. When you get a cut in your finger, do you have to do anything? No. You only have to keep it clean and in a few days it will be healed. Your body has a number of problems within because you have not allowed it to rest. If you know the art of total relaxation, the art of allowing your body to rest, most of these troubles will go away after a few weeks.

When an animal is wounded in the woods, it knows how to do this. It seeks a peaceful corner in the forest and it lays down for several days. Several generations of ancestors have transmitted to them the wisdom that this is the only way to restore themselves. They don't have doctors, they don't have pharmacists, but they know how to rest. They don't need to run after their prey, they don't need to eat—in fact, they fast during these three, four, five days of resting. And one day the animal is healed and it stands up and it goes to look for a source of food.

We don't know how to do like animals. In order to get well quickly we bring a lot of interventions into our body: we take a lot of drugs, we undergo a lot of treatments. But we don't know how to allow our body to rest. So learning how to allow your body to rest is a very important practice. Love your body. You learn total relaxation and you can do it several

times a day. Five minutes is enough, ten minutes. Even three minutes are already very good if you know how to allow your body to rest completely.

And for your spirit, it is the same. Our consciousness is able to heal itself. It has the power of self healing but you don't allow it to rest. You continue to feed your consciousness with your anger, your worries, your thinking, and so on. You don't believe in your consciousness. You are seeking for a means to heal it but you don't know how to allow yourself to rest. You keep thinking the whole day and you keep worrying the whole day. You never allow yourself to rest. If you know how to practice total relaxation, you'll know how to smile and how to send your smile to different parts of your body. During that time, you have stopped thinking and worrying because you are focused on your body, your breathing, your walking. When you practice mindful breathing, when you practice "In, out, deep, slow," not only can you nourish yourself—body and spirit—but you can also stop your thinking. Stopping the thinking, stopping the worries, is very important.

Our mind is like a cassette tape turning nonstop day and night. We have a habit. You are not there, because you are carried away by your thinking, by your worries. You may get lost in the past, regretting the past or being caught in the suffering that you endured during the past. You suffered in the past already but now you want to suffer more by recalling the past. You call your past back in order for you to suffer more. Why do you have to show it several times, your suffering? Cows, when they eat grass, they swallow and then they bring it up again and swallow for a second time. Many of us do the same. We have suffered already in the past. But we want to bring our suffering back to the present moment and suffer more. We like that.

The future is not yet there but we think of it and we worry, and we become scared. We are not capable of dwelling in the present moment where life is. Life and its many wonders are available inside of you and around you and yet you are not able to touch its wonders because you get lost in the past, in the future, and also in your projects, your worries. How can your mind rest and restore itself? Our mind also has the capacity of self healing just as our body.

Remember when you lost someone very dear, you suffered, and you thought that you'd never restore yourself, you'd never be able to forget that suffering. You thought that the suffering would dwell with you, the wound would be with you, forever. But some time later you got used to it and you were able to go on with life. This means that your mind, your spirit, was able to heal itself.

We have to trust our spirit in the way we trust our body. Our spirit has the power of self healing if only we know how to allow it to rest and don't continue to feed it with more worries, with more projects, with more fear. The practice of mindful breathing, mindful walking, enjoying the contemplation of the sky, of the vegetation, of being with friends, enjoying things in the present moment, helps you to stop these kinds of feelings—the heart and the spirit filling with worries and fear. You will heal in the inside.

During the time you are here in Plum Village, you are surrounded by many friends who are practicing resting, recuperating themselves. Do a lot of total relaxation, mindful relaxing, walking, and sitting meditation, and enjoying doing things mindfully to help the sangha.

[Bell]

Many of us have had the good fortune of having a loving father, a loving mother, a loving teacher, or a loving brother or sister or friend. We have to call on them for help. Whether they are still alive or they have passed away, they are always there in you.

A father always wants to love his child. That is the deepest nature of a father. If you see that your father does not love you, it is because he was not able to manifest his love, that's all. No one had helped him to express his love. All fathers, deep inside, want to love their child. But if they say, "I hate you! I don't recognize you as my child!" that is because they do not know how to do it. It does not mean that a father does not love his child. You also, you love your children even if your children do things you consider to be negative, that irritate you. Still, deep inside you, the love you have for your children is still intact. You only need to learn how to express your love. There are many people who think that their father or their mother doesn't love them, many are victims of such a vision. But, according to my experience, all fathers love their children, deeply. All mothers, also. Even animals, they love their children.

When you look into your hand—if you look deeply—you'll see that this hand of yours is also the hand of your mother and your father. Because you are a continuation of him, you are a continuation of her. This hand has been transmitted to you by your mother, by your father. It is also the hand of your ancestors. So, don't think that this is only your hand. This is the hand of several generations. And you are going to transmit this to your children and their children.

All your wisdom, all the wisdom, all the experience, all the suffering, all the happiness of all the generations of your ancestors are here in your hand. Our ancestors, their wisdom, their happiness, their sorrow, their hope, their fear are there inside you. They all have been transmitted to you. In every cell of your body you find everything: all the hope, all the fear, all the happiness, all the suffering of all the ancestors are in each cell of you. Now mankind is capable of cloning itself. We need only to take one cell, any cell of our body, and we can duplicate ourselves.

This means that in each cell there is the presence of you as a whole. The one is the all, that is the teaching of the Buddha in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. And in each cell of our body there is hell, there is the Pure Land. There is the Buddha, there is Mara, there is Jesus, there is Satan, there is happiness, there is sorrow, in just one cell. All our ancestors can be touched, can be found in one cell, because one cell contains everything. And this is not just an abstract idea. You have heard of the technique of cloning. We know that one cell can manifest as the whole thing. So look in your own hand, and you'll see that the cells in your hand are also the cells of your father, your mother, your ancestors. Many of them were wise, were happy. Call on these elements within yourself to come and help you and rescue you.

You have blood ancestors and you also have spiritual ancestors in yourself. If I only have blood ancestors, I cannot be myself, as I am now. Now I use my eyes in such a way that my ancestors did not. I have learned the Buddha's way of looking. I look at things with mindfulness. I look at things and touch the nature of interbeing in them. The way I look at the sky, at a pebble, as a person, is very deep. And without the Buddha, my teacher, I could not look like that. The way I breathe, the way I walk, also. My feet, walking, are also the feet of the Buddha. I am walking with the Buddha's feet. Not only do I walk with my mothers feet and my fathers feet, but also I walk with the feet of the Buddha, because each step I can generate joy and peace.

You have your beloved father in you. You have your beloved mother in you. You have your beloved teacher in you. Your teacher may be Jesus, your teacher may be Buddha, and, according to your practice, your teacher is more or less evident, powerful, in you.

Suppose you have a painful spot on your body. Why don't you call on your father, your mother, your ancestors, to come and help? Touch that painful spot with the energy of healing, of love. Because you know that deeply in him, your father loves you, deeply in her, your mother loves you, deeply in him, your teacher loves you and wants you well.

Suppose you have a tumor that might become important and the doctors say that the only way is to open you up and take it and throw it out. That is our tendency. If there is something that we don't want, we tend to cut it out and to throw it away: surgery. We have created the painful things in our body and we don't want them any more, we want to throw them out. It is the same with your mind, your consciousness. There are tumors in your consciousness, the tumor of hate, of despair, of depression. And we also want to cut and throw it out.

That is a way of life, a habit of thinking that we have learned from this new society. If you don't want anything, you eliminate it either by using a gun or a knife. We have to look deeply into our civilization and to see in what direction we are going. When we have something painful in us, we don't know how to take good care of it. We don't know how to embrace it the way we embrace our child. We want to take it, to throw it out. We want to punish it.

So, breathe in deeply, and see that this hand is the hand of your father, your loving father, or your loving mother or your loving teacher. Even if she is no longer alive, she still is real in you because every cell in you is also her. Every cell in you is also him. Call on them to help. There are healthy cells in you, and the healthy cells will come to rescue the cells that are not so healthy. Because you do not know how to take care of them, some of them are tired and are being transformed into a problem.

So breathe in and bring your father, your mother, and your loving teacher back into your hand. You call the name of your father, the name of your teacher and suddenly your hand becomes the hand of your mother, your teacher. And then, when you breath out, touch the painful spot. Breathe slowly. Transmit all these energies to the painful spot. And after you finish, do it again. Breathe in, call his name, and you make him alive, you make her alive. The energy of your father or your teacher will be present in your hand. And when you breathe out you smile, and the energy of your father or your teacher will penetrate into you. Practice like this every day, whether in a sitting position or in a laying down position.

In the moment of your practice you are totally relaxed. You have faith in the people who love you, who want to wish you well. Then you make them present in the form of energy and you use that energy to touch and heal. Your hand has a healing power. You don't need someone else. Every one of us has a healing power within himself or herself, an energy you can generate into the palm of your hand. That energy is stored within each cell of your body. Learn to do it with your body. If you have a liver that does not work so well, that is suffering, concentrate yourself, inviting your father, your mother.

I have no doubt that my father always loved me. And I don't consider my father as nonexistent, because my father is in every cell in me. When I call on him, he is back in every cell in my body. When I generate that energy called the energy of a loving father, I touch myself and say, "Father, please help" And your father will be transmitting to you this energy. During that time you feel peaceful, knowing you are being loved, being taken care of by your father.

Remember when you were a small child, you had a fever and your tongue was so bitter you didn't want to eat anything? And your front felt like it was burning and when your mother came, she put her hand on your forehead, and suddenly you felt like you were in paradise. Just one hand. You felt much better with the presence of your mother and just one hand. Don't think that hand is no longer there. It is still there because your hand is the continuation of your mother's hand. And if you call on her, "Mommy? Please help," when you breath in and then, when you put your hand on your forehead and you breath out, you will receive exactly the same energy. Nothing is lost.

Take care of your body in such a way. Allow your body to rest in whatever position you are. And later you will be able to take care of your spirit, your ailing spirit, in the same way. You have blocks of pain, of sorrow, of fear, of despair within yourself. You have to embrace these blocks of pain and sorrow exactly in the same way. Call on them to help.

The Buddha-to-be is not something abstract. The Buddha is very deep in me because I have learned the practice. I have learned to look in the way the Buddha looked. I have learned to breathe the way the Buddha breathed. I have learned to walk in the way the Buddha walked. On the Gridhrakuta Mountain where the Buddha stayed more than twenty years, I sat there and I contemplated the very sunset that he had contemplated. I was looking with my eyes and his eyes at the beautiful sunset.

You also are capable of looking with your Buddha eyes. In your daily life you are used to looking with your eyes, the eyes that do not have the energy of mindfulness and concentration behind them. But with your mindful breathing, you can generate the Buddha eyes in you. When you use these eyes to look, you will see things much differently. It is like having a pair of binoculars and if you bring them up to your eyes, you can see differently. So, you have the Buddha eyes transmitted to you by your teacher. Why don't you use them? Just breathing in, breathing out, generates the energy of mindfulness and suddenly, you have the Buddha eyes. Looking with the Buddha eyes, you will not get angry. You will despair.

You should not have any complex. The Buddha is enough, Jesus is enough. Jesus said so, "I am in the father, the father is in me, I am in you, and you are in me." Very clear. You can't deny that teaching in the heart of Christianity.

So, if the Buddha is in you, why don't you call on him for help? You just breathe in and breathe out and Buddha will be alive, you can use Buddha eyes, Buddha hands. "Dear Buddha, please help," and suddenly you have the hand of the Buddha available to you. How simple. What else do you practice? What else do you learn? This is very simple, easy to understand, and yet very deep. The healing that you want, you can provide by yourself. You are supported by the sangha, by the Dharma, by the Buddha, every moment of your daily life. If only you know this, you will realize that support is always available and then you will not feel alone and scared.

So today, in the Dharma discussion, please discuss this practice. Allow us to rest. Allow our body to rest. There are techniques of resting. You may not be used to them but they are good habits to learn. We have learned the other kind of habit of not resting, and now we have to learn a positive habit to be able to rest—bodily and mentally. And we have to share with each other the ways we do this to arrive at a relaxed state of the body and of the mind.

Walking is a way of resting, sitting is a way of resting, eating is a way of resting. Don't struggle. We have struggled all our lives, we have gone nowhere at all. Stop the struggle and take care of our body, our mind. Practice resting and restoring ourselves and we'll go very far.

We will get together and discuss this. We will share our experience of the practice of resting. There are brothers and sisters who have been in the practice longer, they can share their practice. You may ask questions. And we practice the first day, the second day, and then we'll meet again and share again our practice. If you have any difficulties, if you have any questions, or if you have some success, some joy in your practice, please share these with other people.

We practice as a sangha. There are dharma teachers available in our midst, there are also brothers and sisters who are familiar with the teaching and the practice. So do profit from their presence.

And when you feel concentrated and mindful, and you enjoy your practice of walking, of breathing, of smiling, then you'll contribute a lot to the sangha. Because if we see you relaxed, walking mindfully, smiling, breathing mindfully, we will be reminded to do the same. Together, we'll produce that collective energy that will nourish us. When we go home, we can continue the practice even with our children. Because the children in Plum Village proved that they are capable of the practice.

## Recognizing Feelings

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on November 25, 1999 in Plum Village, France.

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Today is the 25<sup>th</sup> of November 1999 and we are in the Lower Hamlet, we know that we have thirty seven days to live before the arrival of the year 2000. I like to visualize the 21st century as a beautiful hill. It would be wonderful to climb the hill together. To climb, is not to arrive, but just for the pleasure of climbing.

Suppose here is the year 2000 and here is 2100 and this must be 2050 and we have 37 days before the arrival at this point. To climb a hill together does not mean that we want to arrive as soon as possible at the year 2050, but just to enjoy the climbing, especially if we climb with the Sangha, people who know how to appreciate what is happening in the present moment because there are many wonders of life that are available in the here and the now and climbing is not to arrive, just to climb, just to enjoy climbing.

The practice of Buddhism is the practice of living deeply every moment of your daily life and the heart of the practice is mindfulness, because mindfulness is the capacity to be there, fully present in the here and the now. And when we have the energy of mindfulness we are capable of being there in the here and the now because that is a basic condition for touching deeply life. If you are distracted, if your mind is caught by your regret concerning the past, or the fear and uncertainty about the future, then you are not capable of being there fully alive in the here and the now. Therefore, you miss all the wonders of life that are available in that moment. That is why mindfulness is at the heart of Buddhist practice, you have to be mindful of every moment of your daily life.

When you drink your morning tea you should drink your tea in such a way that life should be possible in that moment. Peace, stability and joy be possible in that moment of tea drinking. You have to be concentrated, you have to be mindful of the tea in order for your tea drinking to be a real act of mindfulness. Only by drinking your tea in mindfulness that you can enjoy really the tea, you have to be totally present in that moment of drinking tea. You have to help the tea to reveal itself one hundred percent to you. You have to offer yourself one hundred percent for the tea and then you and the tea will become perfect in that moment. And the tea drinking can bring you a lot of happiness. That is simple, that is something you can do and that is the practice.

When you sit with your son or your daughter, sit in such a way that you be there one hundred percent of yourself, for him, for her. You will see that your son or your daughter will reveal himself or herself to you one hundred percent. You are available to him to her and she will be available to you one hundred percent. So, sit with your daughter in such a way that you are totally present and alive so that the moment of sitting together becomes an eternal moment. A moment of joy, of peace. If you are caught by your worries, by your regret, your fear, your anger you are not there and your daughter, your son is not there either.

When you look at the morning sky you look at the sky in such a way that the sky will reveal to you one hundred percent of itself, and the basic condition is that you be there one hundred percent for the sky. I remember one day I received the visit of a reporter from San Francisco. He was there to interview me and I invited him to have tea with me in the garden. I proposed that he forget the interview, that he just enjoy the tea with me and I gave him instructions as to how to enjoy the tea, to be there fully for the tea and he liked it.

He had a taste of mindfulness practice, that is why the article he wrote is good. Because what is the use of interviewing if you don't know the practice? And then I walked with him to his car. Halfway I asked him to stop and I proposed to him to look up at the blue sky and, breathing in I am aware of the blue sky, breathing out I smile to the blue sky. And we stood there looking at the sky, breathing in and out together and smiling. And he told me, it is wonderful, it is the first time I look at the sky that way, very deep. The sky revealed itself to him entirely because he was there one hundred percent for the sky. Many of us have looked at



the sky, have seen the sky of course, but not in that way. If our mindfulness is clear then the sky will reveal itself to us in such a deep way. So, drink your tea, sit with your son or daughter, look at the sky in such a way that life be possible in that moment. That is life.

The word Buddhism comes from the root Budh. Budh means to wake up, to be awake, to know what is going on. Budh means to know also, to know what is going on and the one who is awake, the one who is mindful knowing what is going on, that one we call him/her a Buddha. Buddha is not the name of a person, Buddha is just a word that describes someone who is really present, awake, knowing what is happening and that is why the energy that inhabits the Buddha is the energy of mindfulness. Mindfulness is the capacity of being truly present in the moment. And when we drink our tea perfectly in mindfulness we are a Buddha but because we don't practice we are not a full time Buddha. We are a Buddha for a few seconds and then we are non-Buddha again. That is why with the support of a community we can be more and more a Buddha.

Practicing mindfulness you will develop the capacity of being free, we cultivate our freedom and we know that freedom is the foundation of our happiness. There is no happiness without freedom. When we walk we can walk as a free person or as a slave, it depends on your way of walking. If you are caught by your anger, by your worry about the future, by your guilt concerning the past then you are not a free person, you walk but you are a slave. But if you are capable of making steps that are solid, peaceful, and if you enjoy every step that you make you are free from your worries, your fear, your regret and then you are a free person. And being a free person you can be very happy. So the amount of happiness you have depends on the amount of freedom you have in your heart. So, the practice of mindfulness, being there in the here and the now is really the practice of freedom. Not to allow yourself to be caught by the past, by the future, by your worries, by your anxieties. Free yourself in order to be there in the here and the now, to touch the wonders of life that are available in the here and the now, that is the practice of mindfulness.

During walking meditation, whether we walk alone or walk with a group of people we should learn how to walk as a free person. And as a free person you can enjoy every step you make. The earth that you tread becomes the Kingdom of God, becomes the Buddha Land. Whether it is hell or the Kingdom of God depends on us on our way of walking. If we are full of sorrow, of fear, of anger, of violence, the very ground that we walk, that we tread becomes hell. But if we are a free person, if we have the energy of love, compassion, understanding and freedom in our heart and then the place will become the Kingdom of God, the Buddha Land. Everything depends on us, everything depends on our freedom and that is why practicing Buddhist meditation means to contemplate your freedom.

When you clean the floor, when you clean the bathroom or the kitchen you can do that as a slave or as a free person. As a slave you suffer but the other person while scrubbing the floor, cleaning the bathroom is very happy because she is a free person, it depends on your way. And mindfulness helps you to free yourself, and you can clean the bathroom with a lot of love and understanding, with a smile and that is an expression of your love and doing the work of cleaning the bathroom or the kitchen you get a lot of happiness. But if you are accompanied by your anger, discrimination and despair, cleaning the bathroom or the kitchen may become hard labor and we suffer a lot, every minute of doing it. That is why the practice of mindfulness can be described as the practice of freedom. Cultivating freedom. Where is the freedom? Is the freedom possible? Is there any freedom at all? The answer is yes! Freedom is possible and it comes from the practice of mindfulness. When you clean the bathroom with mindfulness, aware of every moment, aware that you are cleaning the bathroom, you are cultivating your freedom. But if you clean the bathroom in forgetfulness, being caught in your anger, your jealousy, in your worries and fear, there is no freedom at all.

Bell

When we practice walking meditation we invest one hundred percent of ourselves in the act of walking. When our body and our mind are fully concentrated on the act of making a step, the energy that helps us to do that is mindfulness and when mindfulness is there we are

concentrated and the object of our concentration is the step we are making. Mindfulness plus concentration will bring forth the solidity, the freedom and the happiness. During the whole time we are walking we keep the energy of mindfulness alive in us, we are entering in the present moment. And when you look upon a person walking, sitting, lying down, cooking, watering the vegetable garden you can see if that person is anchored in the present moment or not.

In the here and the now. Our practice is to learn how to be anchored in the here and the now, all the time. Not to lose ourselves in forgetfulness. Forgetfulness means, we allow ourselves to be carried away by the past, by the future and so on. That is the way of cultivating freedom and when you do that, your brother, your sister around you will learn from you. She will go back to herself, he will go back to himself and walk like you do, breathe like you do, sit like you do and you become a bell of mindfulness for other people. Everyone is practicing freedom and we know that the amount of freedom determines the amount of happiness we have.

When you go back to the present moment you have a chance to recognize many of the wonders of life that are available in the present moment. You need to be in touch with them for your nourishment, for your healing and transformation because there are many things that are refreshing and healing and nourishing around us, and even within us is a lot of goodness. When we go back to ourselves we recognize things that are not good, but if we continue to be there in us we will be able to touch the goodness within us. The same is true of the other person. When you focus your attention on him or her you may have the impression that person does not have enough goodness but that is your first impression only. If you really have enough mindfulness and concentration you will be able to discover that the person also has the potential to be a good person and if you know how to touch the goodness within her then she will be transformed into a very pleasant person.

If you live in a superficial way we can recognize only what is wrong, but we are not capable of realizing what is not wrong in us, in the other person and around us. We have the tendency to think that what is wrong is overwhelming and that is why we have a lot of depression and anger and fear but if we are capable of establishing ourselves firmly in the here and the now we will be able to recognize the positive elements that are still available in us and around us.

Suppose you get into a garden and you see a number of trees dying and you become depressed. You are not capable of noticing that there are still many trees that are healthy and beautiful. You should be able to notice the presence of these beautiful and healthy trees in order to enjoy them. And if you are supported by these beautiful, positive aspects of life you will be strong enough in order to take care of what is wrong, namely the trees that are dying. We protect what is not wrong and we try to help with what is wrong and that is our situation.

To allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the negative feeling when we touch what is wrong, is not a good thing to do. Therefore we should be able to be there in order to recognize the positive elements for our nourishment and healing. And we need a friend, a brother, a sister who practices in order to help us realize that. A good dharma brother, a good dharma sister will tell you that there are still many wonderful things around, and if you know how to be in touch with them you get the nourishment and healing that you need. Then you will be strong enough to take care of what is wrong.

There are things that are very much to our liking, but mindfulness helps us not to be possessive, attached to them. We know that the fresh breeze, the clean air, the beautiful sky are all wonderful and we can profit from them, and we need time. But you don't need to possess them, you don't need to be attached to them. You don't have to make them your own, preventing the other people to profit from them. Mindfulness is the kind of energy that can help you to identify and to recognize what is there, and also to keep you free.

You see something beautiful, you see someone beautiful, and if you have freedom in you will be capable of enjoying that beauty. Mindfulness will help you not to be attached to it, not to be a slave of it, not to try to possess that to make it yours, and to prevent others from enjoying it. Mindfulness has been described as the act of recognizing things as they are, mere

recognition of what is there. When we see a rose blooming, we recognize there is a rose blooming. When we see that the rose is beautiful we say, the rose is beautiful, simple recognition of what is there. You do not try to be there to tie it to you, to possess it, to be attached to it, or to run away from it, to suppress it or to try to discriminate against it.

When we do something negative your mindfulness will tell you, this is something negative. When you see something not beautiful, your mindfulness will help you to see, this is not so beautiful. Simple recognition of what is there, and how it is; that is the practice of mindfulness. Suppose you have a feeling of joy and breathing in you are aware of the feeling of joy in yourself. Mindfulness is the capacity of recognizing that joy is there in you; that is the practice. And mindfulness also helps you not to be a possessor of joy, trying to possess that joy, trying to make that joy exclusively yours. And that is why when that feeling of joy is no longer there you don't suffer.

When you have a feeling of non-joy arising in you, an unpleasant feeling, mindfulness will help you to recognize it as an unpleasant feeling. Mere recognition that it is an unpleasant feeling and you are still free from that feeling. Breathing in I know that a feeling is in me, breathing out I smile to the feeling. Breathing in I know that this feeling is unpleasant, breathing out I smile to the unpleasant feeling in me. You recognize the feeling and yet you are not a slave of that feeling, whether that feeling is pleasant or unpleasant. In both cases you remain a free person and as a free person you don't suffer much, that is the secret.

Even if you have a physical pain. If you have a physical pain mindfulness will help you to know, to be aware that a physical pain is there. Breathing in I know that there is a physical pain in me, breathing out I smile to the physical pain, and somehow you may remain a free person. If you try very hard to suppress the physical pain, you try to resist, your suffering is increased by ten times, twenty times because you are not free. If you are free you suffer very little, if you are not free you suffer ten times, twenty times more, that is why mindfulness can help. I repeat this, if it is a pleasant feeling, recognize it simply as a pleasant feeling, not to be attached to it, not try to possess it, not try to make it last longer, not try to make it eternal. Because if you do you will suffer, because everything is impermanent, including your pleasant feeling. So, whether the pleasant feeling is there or is not there, you are a free person and that is the key of your happiness.

If the unpleasant feeling is there, recognize it as being there, not trying to resist, not trying to combat, and then you are still a free person, you don't have to suffer much because an unpleasant feeling is also impermanent. Any feeling is impermanent, whether pleasant or unpleasant, and you are not touched by the unpleasant feeling, whether it is mental or physical. When you have physical pain you tend to worry a lot, you tend to resist a lot, you really want to hurry in order to remove the physical pain. And that kind of tension, that kind of resistance, that kind of attitude will make the physical pain in you double, triple, ten times, one hundred times more intense, that is why mindfulness practice is just to recognize it as it is, smiling to it. The practice of mindfulness is to maintain your freedom in order for you not to suffer.

The Buddha offers us this example. Suppose someone is struck by an arrow. He is suffering. Suppose a second arrow comes and strikes exactly that same spot, now the pain will not be double, the pain can be ten times or fifty times more intense. So, if you have a mental or physical pain and you recognize it with freedom then you just suffer a little bit, but if you resist, if you are eager to suppress it, if you get angry, if you get a lot of worries and fear then your unpleasant feelings will be one hundred times more intense and you suffer a lot. And that is the second arrow. Never allow the second arrow to hit you, that is the practice. And only the freedom, with the practice of mindfulness, you can avoid the second arrow to come and hit you, simple recognition, mere recognition, is a very wonderful practice. And if you know how to practice mindfulness of relaxation, mindfulness of smiling, of breathing and then the feeling whether mental or physical will diminish and you know that if you are allowed to be touched by the healing, refreshing elements within and around you there will be a transformation and then the unpleasant feeling in you whether mental or physical will be

relieved little by little. You know what to do and what not to do in order for the pain not to increase. And to know what to do and what not to do is the job of mindfulness because if you are mindful you know the situation well. If you are in the here and the now you know the situation better, and if you know the situation better you know what to do, and especially what not to do, in order not to make the situation worse. That is why mindfulness practice is very crucial in our daily life.

When we come to a practice center where people practice mindfulness, we have a chance to learn the art of mindful living. You have the chance to learn walking in mindfulness so you can enjoy every step you take. Walking in mindfulness is what all of us are supposed to do in Plum Village and the technique of walking is simple. Produce your true presence, body and mind united and make one step. Not to allow yourself to be carried away by the past or by the future, your projects, by your fear and just be there and enjoy making one step: with freedom, of course. Freedom from the past, freedom from the future, freedom from your projects, freedom from your resistance. Allow yourself to be there in the here and the now and make one step and you become a Buddha; a walking Buddha and if you are capable of making one step like that you know that you can make a second step and you can make also a third step. And your walking becomes very healing and transforming and you are supported by other brothers and sisters around you because they are practicing the same walking with freedom and enjoying every step they make. Walking as a free person. Walk like a free person and not a slave.

When we say the Kingdom of God is at hand, you have to say, are you ready to enter the Kingdom of God? The Kingdom of God is available, the Pure Land is available, it is there, it is only you who are not ready. You have no freedom, therefore the Kingdom of God is not yours, the Buddha Land is not yours. The Kingdom of God is only for those who are free and cultivating our freedom is your practice. Life is full of wonders, if you are free you come in touch with all these wonders, they all belong to the Kingdom of God. That is why, to allow yourself to be carried by your resistance, your fear, your anger is to run away on the Kingdom of God. Knowing that the Kingdom of God is there waiting for you with all the wonders, abandon all these kinds of worries and fears, and anger and resistance in breath, outbreath and produce your true presence, your freedom and with only one step you can step into the Kingdom of God.

I remember twenty years ago speaking in a church in the vicinity of Philadelphia, a church attended by the black people I made that declaration for the first time; you don't have to die in order to enter the Kingdom of God, in fact, you have to be very alive. Free yourself, go back to the here and the now and with only one step you can already enter into the Kingdom of God. And during another retreat in Plum Village with Catholic nuns and monks, during the time we sit in the woods after walking meditation I turned to my friends and I said, "the Kingdom of God is now or never..." so be ready for it. And your practice is to walk in the Kingdom of God every day and if you are capable of doing it in Plum Village, you will be able to do it in Philadelphia, in New York City, Zurich, Bangkok and so on. So this is the place to train yourself to walk in the Kingdom of God. If you wait until you die it may be too late. And to me the Kingdom of God, the Buddha Land is available only in the here and the now; the message is very clear, otherwise we waste our life.

With our steps, with our mindful steps, we get anchored in the here and the now - the only address of life. The only real address of life: all the other addresses are fake. The real address of life is here and now, including the zip code. And if you ask the address of the Kingdom of God, the address of the Buddha, of Bodhisattvas I will tell you, the same address, here and now. Therefore our practice is to go back all the time to the here and the now in order to encounter true life and in order to encounter the Kingdom of God, the Buddha Land. And if your practice is strong, authentic, then you get it today, you don't need tomorrow, you can get it today. And the more you practice the more you enjoy, the practice is enjoyable. You don't practice for the future, you practice for the here and the now because the Dharma is described as not a matter of time, transcending time. The Dharma is for the here and the now.

With the practice of mindful breathing also you get anchored in the here and the now. Breathe in and out in such a way that you establish yourself always in the here and the now, while you eat, while you drink, while you wash dishes, while you sit with your son, your daughter, your brother, your sister. The practice of mindful breathing or mindful walking is very crucial, very basic in Plum Village.

The Buddha said, if you practice mindfulness in seven years you get your freedom, your emancipation. And then he said, you don't need seven years, one year may be enough if you practice mindfulness and then in one year you get your freedom. And after that he said, maybe you don't need one year, you need seven months and if you practice with all your heart in seven months you get your freedom, your emancipation. And then he looked at his disciples and he said, maybe you don't need seven months, you need seven days. Because if you get down to the practice, you practice with all your heart in seven days you get your freedom, it means your total happiness. And then he looked at them again and said, maybe you don't need seven days, you need one day, twenty four hours. You put all your strength, your heart into it and then in twenty four hours you can get your freedom and your happiness. And these words are recorded at the end of a discourse called Sattipattana Sutta, the Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. It is very meaningful, because every minute of the practice can already bring you joy and emancipation. It means that with only one step you can already get some freedom, with another step you get more freedom. One in breath you get some freedom, one out breath you can more freedom, you are cultivating your freedom all the time. because no happiness, no peace, no stability will be possible without freedom. So we can attribute, we can describe that the practice of mindfulness is the practice of freedom.

This morning we talked about the mindfulness trainings, the mindful manners as means to protect our freedom and to develop our freedom and now we are talking about the practice of breathing, of walking, of cleaning, as a practice of freedom also. Freedom is so precious for us, and that is why we come to the Sangha, we come to the practice center.

In our tradition, in our Zen tradition if you are in the meditation hall, in the Dharma hall you have to keep very quiet, very still. You are expected not to produce any noise. As soon as you arrive in the Dharma hall or in the meditation hall you sit down and you begin to practice mindful breathing. You don't talk, you don't do anything to create any noise. That is very important because the noise, even small noises, will harm the practice of other people. Out of respect for the Sangha we should be sitting very still and not making movements or other noises. This is in the tradition. It is very helpful and we have to learn how to do it. There should be no talking in the meditation hall, in the Dharma hall.

## Mindfulness of the Body in the Body

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on Dec 12, 1999 in Plum Village, France.

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Today is the second of December 1999, and we are in the New Hamlet for our Dharma talk. We are in our winter retreat. We have been speaking about the five skandhas, the five elements that make up our own person, and that is exactly the object of our meditation. To meditate means to be aware of what is going on in the domain of the five skandhas, and the Buddha gave us very specific recommendations how to recognize these elements, to look deeply into their nature, to understand deeply the nature of these elements, and that understanding will lead to our liberation, to our freedom.

We know that the first aggregate, the first element, is called form. Form here means our body. We care very much about our form, but do we really care about our form? We buy a lot -- fruit, medicine, cosmetics, and so on, for the sake of our form, but do we really care for it? Do we know exactly what our form is? Do we understand it? Do we know how to take good care of it? If we don't, then we have to learn from the Buddha, our teacher. And the Buddha advises us, first of all, to go back to our form, to our body, and make peace with it, because we may be at war with our body. We may have mistreated our body, we may have made our body suffer a lot, and between us and our body there may be a lot of conflict. Going back to your body and embracing it and reconciling with it, that is the first act of meditation.

There are four domains of meditation, in fact the object of meditation is of four kinds. The first is our body, the second is our feelings, the third is our mind, and the fourth is the object of our mind. Mind here means consciousness. We don't know enough about our body, we don't know enough about our feelings, we don't know enough about our mind, and we don't know enough about the objects of our mind. Therefore, to meditate means to go back to these four realms and try to understand and to take care. These four objects of our meditation are sometimes called the foundations of mindfulness. According to this teaching, our breath is part of our body. That is why going back to our breath is already going back to our body. All Buddhist manuals of meditation practice begin with going back to our breath, because if you know how to go back to your breath, you go back to your body very easily, and then you go back to your feelings and your mind, and then you go back to the objects of your mind. Objects of your mind means objects of perception. This morning we learned about the foundation, the base, the object of our perception. So, our breath is included in our body and that is why as a practitioner we should be able to go back to our breathing in order to go back entirely to our body. Our breath can be considered to be a wonderful vehicle bringing us back to our body and our feelings, our mind, etc. We don't need a lot of time in order to go back to our body and our feelings, if we know how to use that wonderful vehicle called breathing, and this is called mindful breathing. Because breathing is something you do every day, but most of us do not breathe mindfully, and therefore we cannot go back to our body and our feelings. Our practice is to learn how to breathe mindfully and if you breathe mindfully you are back already to your breath, namely to part of your body. If you continue to practice mindful breathing, then you will go back entirely to your body. Go back to our body, reconcile with it, get to know what is going on in our body. The wrong that we have done to our body, the conflicts we are having with our body, and we will know what to do and what not to do in order to be on good terms with our body.

So the Anapanasatti Sutta, the Discourse on Mindful Breathing is something that every meditator has to learn, has to study. The day I discovered the Discourse on Mindful Breathing I felt as if I was the happiest person on earth, really a heritage. Suppose you go

around and you discover a field where a lot of treasure is buried in it. You know that you have become a very rich person. You will be able to buy anything. That was my feeling when I discovered the Sutra on Mindful Breathing. I had the feeling that I had discovered a treasure and it made me very happy. That is why I have nourished the idea to translate it and to give commentaries to it, and to make suggestions as to how to make use of the Sutra on Mindful Breathing. Now that book is available, a translation of the Discourse on Mindful Breathing from both Pali and Chinese, with commentaries and with suggestions as to how to apply mindful breathing into our daily life. If you are a serious practitioner you should learn about the techniques, the art of mindful breathing. It is very important. As soon as you embrace the practice you can feel better right away. It's good to be home to yourself and your breath is already your home, the door of your home. Closing the door, going into the home, you know that you are already home.

If you continue with the practice of mindful breathing, you will go back not only to your body, but you will go back to your feelings. All the mental formations that manifest in yourself including fear, desire, love, despair, hope, you will go back to them. You will recognize them, you will embrace them, you will begin to look deeply into their nature, and you will get the right kind of understanding that will set you free.

Last year we offered a twenty-one day retreat in North America on the practice of mindful breathing. Twenty-one days, and we only learned about mindful breathing and we did use the Discourse on Mindful Breathing during our retreat. We hope that the Dharma talks given during that retreat, also the session for questions and answers will be made into a book so that people who did not have a chance to attend the retreat, could get a taste of the retreat by reading the book.

Inquire about the art of mindful breathing from your brother, from your sister in the Dharma. Enjoy the practice of mindful breathing, it is very rewarding. I assure you that when you begin to practice it, you will feel better right away.

Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in,  
Breathing out, I know that I am breathing out.  
Breathing in, I feel alive,  
Breathing out, I smile.

It is wonderful. You can change your life right away.

We know that the practice in Plum Village is to always try to go back to the present moment, to the here and the now. Because we know that only in the here and the now can we touch life deeply, and learning how to live deeply each moment of our daily life is our true practice. Therefore, mindful breathing can always bring us back to the here and the now. If you lose your mindful breathing, you will lose the present moment. It's not that mindful breathing is the only way to go back to the present moment, there are other ways, like mindful walking. Mindful walking can bring you back to the here and the now also. Mindful washing, mindful eating, there are many kinds of practice that can bring us back to the here and the now and touch life deeply, but mindful breathing can be practiced any time of the day. And if you are anchored in your mindful breathing, you don't risk losing the here and the now, namely losing life, because life is available only in the here and the now. So let us cultivate the art of mindful breathing in order for us to be able to settle in the here and the now, in our true home so that we will profit fully from the fact that we are alive and life is available with all its wonders.

When you practice mindful breathing you have a chance to go back to your body and recognize your body as your home. When you stand like this, "Breathing in, I am aware of

my body, my whole body; breathing out, I smile to my whole body.” So standing like this you can practice. Or if you sit on a chair, you might like to practice, “Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body; breathing out, I smile to my body.” It’s very nice of you to recognize your body and smile to it. If you cannot do it, how can you do it for another person? Smile to yourself, smile to your body, recognize its presence, it’s very kind of you to do so. In the four positions of your body, you recognize your body: standing, sitting, walking, lying down, the four basic positions of your body. When you stand you are aware that your body is in a standing position; when you walk you are aware of the walking position of your body, that’s what we do in walking meditation; when we sit, we are aware that we are sitting; and when we lie down, we are aware of the lying down position of our body.

Body as a whole, body in the four positions, body in its various movements. When you bend down and pick up the marker, you are aware that you are bending down. When you stand upright, you are aware that you are standing upright. So not only are you aware of the position of your body but you are also aware of each movement of your body. In the beginning you do it slowly so that you can be aware of it easily. Suppose I hold this, and I slowly put it down. I become mindful all the way through. And now I have the intention to pick up that marker. I do it slowly so that I can be aware of each moment of the movement. Picking it up I am aware, bringing it closer to me I am aware, being aware of the movement.

When you walk, that is a movement. The mind is not thinking of anything else. Your mind is focused on the movement of walking. One hundred percent of your mind is put into the act of making a step. In the Vipassana tradition sometimes they do it like this: you are about to lift your right foot, and when you lift your right foot you are aware that you are lifting, so you use the word, “lifting”. Then when you move, you say, “moving”, and then you place it down, “placing”. “Lifting, moving, placing; lifting, moving, placing; lifting, moving, placing”. That is the idea. But if you are not careful, you become an automat, you do it automatically, and life will disappear. Do it in such a way that life is still there, do it in such a way that the act of meditation remains enjoyable. Because if you make life disappear you become a machine, and that is not meditation. You understand? Lifting, that’s mindfulness, moving, that’s mindfulness, placing, that’s mindfulness. Yes, you can do that - but with the condition that life still remains with you and the act of meditation becomes a joyful, pleasant act because you are not practicing for the future, you are practicing in order to live your life much more deeply, cultivating solidity, freedom, and happiness in the here and the now. Remember the three characteristics of the Dharma: not a matter of time, dealing with the present moment, joyful, happiness. So you are free to adopt any kind of practice with the condition that you retain life, joy, and you continue to cultivate your solidity, your freedom, and your joy. “Lifting, moving, placing” is okay, is good with the condition that you don’t become a machine, with the condition that the practice should bring you joy and happiness in the here and the now. Because you do not practice for the future, you practice for the present moment, and you assure a future because the future is made only with one element, the present. So taking good care of the present, you take care of the future. Don’t worry about the future.

So when you walk from here to the kitchen in order to serve the food, don’t say “I have to walk to the kitchen in order to get the food”, don’t say “I have to”. Say, “I am enjoying walking to the kitchen”, and each step is an end by itself. The steps are no longer means to arrive at an end. This is very important in Buddhist practice. There is no distinction between means and end. In the world they say, “I will do everything in order to reach that end.” It’s not like that in the Buddhist practice because everything you do is by itself an end. Everything you do should be in terms of the Dharma, it means everything you do should cultivate freedom, solidity, and happiness. So you know how to walk. No distinction between means and end. That is the practice of Buddhism. Remember: there is no way to



happiness, happiness is the way. There is no way to enlightenment, enlightenment is the way. Every time you make a step, you make an act of enlightenment. Because what is enlightenment, enlightenment is mindfulness. Mindfulness is the capacity of being aware of what is going on, and that is enlightenment. I am enlightened on the fact that I am making a step. Each step has its own value. Every act, every step that you make should be an act of enlightenment, a work of art. It should have beauty in it, it should have the good, the beautiful, and the true in it.

Remember, in the practice of Buddhism there is no distinction between means and end. When you wash your dishes, make every moment of the time of washing into a work of art, an act of enlightenment. Then you will see that it is wonderful, it's delightful to wash the dishes. That's the way the Buddha washes his bowl. When the Buddha washes his bowl, he is a true artist. He enjoys washing his bowl, he has perfect happiness in the act of washing his bowl. And you are his student and you learn to wash your bowl like the Buddha. You learn to walk like him, you learn to breathe like him, you learn to smile like him.

Enlightenment should be in the here and the now. Enlightenment is not a matter of the future and you can practice enlightenment with every moment of your daily life. Walking, sitting, eating, smiling. That is possible right away in the beginning of the practice. Going back to your breath, recognizing the positions of your body, recognizing every act performed by your body. We should learn how to be authentic, we don't practice for the sake of the form, we do not perform.

When we practice being aware of our body in its parts, that is what we do when we begin our total, deep relaxation. We lay down and first of all we go back to our breath: "Breathing in, I am aware of my in breath; breathing out, I am aware of my out breath". When your breathing is solid, when the quality of your breathing has improved, then become aware of your body as a whole, in the lying position, and just breathe in and out, and enjoy the presence of your body. Give your body a chance to be there without doing anything, total relaxation. That is the practice of love, directed to your body. "Oh my body, I know you are there." Be restful, be relaxed. Then you begin to practice being mindful of each part of your body. "Breathing in, I am aware of my eyes; breathing out, I smile to my eyes." You might do it during one in breath and out breath, or you might do it in ten in breaths and out breaths. You can stay with your eyes as long as you like. Just become aware of your eyes and smile lovingly to them. Your eyes are so wonderful, a wonderful pair of eyes in good condition. Then you switch to your ears: "Breathing out, I am aware of my ears; breathing in, I smile to my ears", and so on. You go from the top of your head to the soles of your feet, going through all the parts of your body. You practice scanning your body with a kind of beam, not laser, but mindfulness.

When you come down to your shoulders, you practice: "Breathing in, I am aware of my shoulders; breathing out, I smile to my shoulders," and you help your shoulders to relax and not to be stiff. When you come to your lungs, you practice mindfulness in order to embrace your lungs. "Breathing in, I know I am aware of my lungs; breathing out, I smile to my lungs." They work so hard, I don't give them enough clean air. "Breathing in, I am aware of my heart; breathing out, I smile to my heart." Now I have to stop drinking alcohol, because I really care for my heart. So you go through your body, you scan your body with the light of mindfulness, recognizing, embracing, smiling to it. That is the teaching of the Buddha, the recommendations made by the Buddha. He told us to take care of our bodies, to go back to them, to be kind to them, to recognize them as a whole and to recognize various parts of our bodies.

In the sutra on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Buddha said, Suppose a farmer went up to the cellar and brings down a bag of seed. He opened one end of the bag and he took the other end of the bag and allowed all the kinds of seeds in the bag to flow on the floor. With eyes in good condition, the farmer recognized: that this is the seed of mung beans, this is the seed of kidney beans, this is the seed of corn, and he distinguished every kind of seed. So the meditator does the same thing. She recognizes her eyes as eyes and smiles to them, she recognizes her lungs as lungs and smiles to them. That is mindfulness of body in the body.

Then the Buddha suggests that we go back to our body and look at the body, becoming aware of elements that can be found in the body: namely the element earth, the element water, the element fire, and the element air. “Breathing in, I recognize the element of solidity in me,” and the element of solidity is represented by earth. It may look solid in the beginning, but slowly we recognize that there is nothing so solid within it, like in the case of a nuclear physicist. “Breathing in, I recognize the element of earth in me; breathing out, I smile to that element in me.” You begin to see more deeply into the nature of your body. “Breathing in, I recognize the element water in me; breathing out, I smile to the element water in me.” I am made of water, at least 70%. It’s very useful, it will bring us knowledge, vision, insight about the true nature of our body. “Breathing in, I am aware of the element fire in my body.” Heat, 37 degrees. If that element increases, I will have fever, I will die. If that element is lower than 37 degrees, I will be sick too. So, “Breathing in, I am aware of the element heat in me; breathing out, I smile to the element heat in me.” The art of the doctor is to keep the four elements in harmony. Health is the result of the harmony of the four elements. In the Asian tradition, a good doctor, a good physician is the one who can help you to retain the balance, the harmony of the four elements.

In the words of encouragement given by Master Quy Son he said “Although this body is supported by the four elements, these four elements very often oppose each other.” Sometimes one is too strong, sometimes one is too weak, and therefore we’ve got trouble. “Even though this body is supported by the four elements, very often these four elements are not in balance.” So the role of a doctor is to help keep these four elements in balance.

“I am aware of the element heat in me; I smile to the element heat in me.” Even when you have a fever, try to smile to your fever, to the heat in your body and you will feel better. If you worry about it, the situation will get worse. “Breathing in, I am aware of the element air in me.” The element air is so important, and the oxygen that we get into our body by the way of our lungs is so important. Our blood always goes back to our lungs; after having received some oxygen it becomes very bright, very red and it carries that oxygen to other cells in the body and releases this oxygen. So breathing in and out, we help our blood to renew itself, to get the oxygen it needs in order to share with all other cells in the body because life is a process of conditions, and we need oxygen for the processes to continue. So the element air is very important. “Breathing in, I am aware of the element air in me; breathing out, I smile to it.”

The Buddha prepared very carefully the blooming of our enlightenment, and we can see in his teaching a lot of compassion and understanding. He understood human beings well and he told us how to take care of our bodies, how to look deeply into our bodies and get the kind of insight we need not be caught in our fear, our worries, and so on.

Once we recognize the four elements in our bodies, we also recognize the four elements outside of our bodies and we know that they are always together. Our life, our organism is an open system. Energy and matter goes through it every second in order to follow processes of changing, to continue. That is why we call our organism an open system.

It's always changing. Matter, energy continue to go through it, life and death happen in every moment, and yet there is a continuation. A continuation happens at the same time with change. We learn about *alaya* --*alaya* is something changing all the time, but continuing all the time. Changing all the time but continuing all the time, whether we know it or not.

So there are things we might like to do, we might enjoy doing in the practice of the contemplation of the body in the body. In the sutra on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Buddha used the terms, "contemplation of the body in the body, or as the body." It means that when we go back to our body we don't consider it only as an object of our perception, but we have to identify with it, we have to remove the frontier between subject and object of perception. That is why the expression, "contemplation of the body in the body" is very important, because in order to really understand something, you have to be with it. You have to be it, you have to remove the frontier between the inquirer and the object being inquired into. If you want to understand someone, put yourself into his skin, and then you can understand. If you continue to look at him as an object, you can never understand that person. This is very true. If you are a couple of friends, if you are father and son or mother and daughter, if you really want to understand each other, you have to become the other person. The only way to understand fully is to become the object of your understanding. This is very important in Buddhist practice. If you still maintain the distinction, the barrier between the object of understanding and the subject of understanding, then true understanding cannot happen.

There is a very nice story about it, the story of a grain of salt. The grain of salt would like to know how salty the water in the ocean is, the degree of salinity of the ocean. "I am a grain of salt, I am very salty. I wonder whether the water in the ocean is that salty." Then a teacher comes and says, "Dear grain of salt, the only way for you to really know the degree of salinity of the ocean is to jump into it." And when the grain of salt jumps into it, it becomes one with the sea water and its understanding is perfect.

So don't expect to understand someone or something fully until you become one with it. In the French language there is a very nice word, the word "comprendre". Comprendre means understand, it means to understand something is to pick it up and to become one with it. "Com" means to be one with it. As far as you are separated from it, don't expect to understand it. That is why the Buddhist practice of meditation is to look at reality in such a way that the frontier will no longer be there. That kind of understanding is called the wisdom of non-discrimination. 'nirvikalpajñana' 'vikalpa' means distinction, discrimination; 'nir' means no. Non discrimination, wisdom. 'jnana' means wisdom. This practice goes very far, not only in terms of understanding, but of action. Suppose you give something to someone, you have to give it to him or to her in such a way that there will be no giver and no receiver. If you still think that you are a giver and that person is a receiver, then that is not the best way of giving, that is not dana paramita. As far as discrimination is still there, that is not perfect giving. You give because the other person is in need of it and the act is very natural. You don't think of yourself as the one who gives and you don't think of him or her as the person who receives the gift, and you don't say, "He is not grateful at all." If you are really practicing perfect giving, you don't have these ideas. Whether that person is grateful or not grateful, you just give. That's non discrimination. So this is not only true in the domain of perception but in the domain of action. The bodhisattva does everything for everyone but never takes credit for it.

So the first object of our mindfulness, of our meditation, is the body. And you know exactly what to do because the Buddha was very careful in offering the teaching. He told us how to go back to our breath, to make peace with our breath, to improve our quality of life with our breath and then embrace, recognize our body as a whole in the four positions, in various movements, in each part and in the elements that have made up the body. There is a

discourse specially spoken for the contemplation of the body in the body, called the Contemplation of the Body. In the Madhya Agama there is a sutra called 'The Sutra on the Contemplation of the Body'.

Today we have mentioned a very important teaching and practice. Practice in such a way that every act you make becomes an act of enlightenment, an act that can bring you solidity and peace and freedom right away. Whether you sweep the ground, whether you clean the bathroom, whether you cook the breakfast for the Sangha, try to enjoy every act you do and consider every act you do as an act of enlightenment. Be the perfect artist, be the real son, daughter, disciple of the Buddha. This is a very important teaching, a very important practice. Your life will change right away and peace, happiness, solidity, non-fear will be yours. You have to cultivate it every day. The true, the good, and the beautiful can be seen in every act of your daily life.

## **The means are the end**

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on Dec 5, 1999 in Plum Village, France.

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Today is the 5th December, 1999 and we are in the Upper Hamlet during our winter retreat. Last time we discussed about means and ends and we learned that in the practice of Buddhism there is no distinction between means and ends and means should be considered to be ends by themselves. This is a very strong practice and we should be able to rely on the Sangha in order to do it.

When you go to the Buddha Hall or to the Dharma Hall you know that you have something to do there: sitting meditation, or listening to a Dharma talk, or cleaning the hall but going there is also a practice. You are requested to sweep the meditation hall in mindfulness, you are supposed to sit beautifully when you listen to a Dharma talk, you are supposed to be concentrated, to be mindful during your sitting meditation so the practice takes place in the meditation hall, but we should know that the practice also takes place during your walking there.

That is why we should try to be practicing during the time we walk to the meditation hall and if you succeed in every step you take then the sitting meditation, or the Dharma talk or the cleaning of meditation hall will be a success.

Because we have the habit of wanting things to be done that is why we tend to neglect, to underestimate the value of the means.

At this time of autumn, I usually rake the leaves in the hermitage. I do this every three days or so and I use a rake. I know that raking the leaves is to have a clean path in order to walk, to do running meditation and so on; I run every day at least two times -I practice mindful running and I rake the leaves in that way(mindfully). Raking the leaves is not only to have only a clean path to run or to walk, but raking the leaves is just to enjoy raking the leaves. So I hold the rake in such a way that I can be happy and solid during the time of holding the rake. And every movement I do I want to make it into an act of enlightenment, an act of joy, an act of peace, so I am not in a hurry, because I see that the act of raking is as wonderful as having a clean path. I would not be satisfied with less than that. Every stroke I make should bring me joy and solidity and freedom. I should be entirely myself during the act of raking the leaves and raking the leaves is no longer a means to arrive at an end that is called having a clean path.

And you don't need to wait for a long time; if you can make one stroke like that, one movement like that, fully investing yourself into the act of raking the leaves then you will be rewarded right away. That is a perfect piece of art that you make because each movement is a work of art.

The same is true when you practice walking. Each step you make should be a perfect work of art, each step can bring you solidity, sovereignty because you do not walk like a slave, you walk like a free person. You walk like a Buddha because you have wanted to be a disciple, a daughter or a son of the Enlightened One, you want to be his continuation, that is why you are capable of making a step with sovereignty, you are fully in control of yourself. You are fully present in the here and the now and you enjoy that step. So walking meditation is not to arrive in the meditation hall. To arrive at the meditation hall is what you want, but you want more than that, because you arrive at the meditation hall several times a day and sometimes ten or twenty arrivals like that don't make any difference. So, one step is enough for you to arrive. I have arrived! With one step.

That is our practice but there is a habit energy that prevents you from doing so. You are used to running to believe that happiness is not possible here and now, happiness is possible only in the future. That kind of belief, that kind of habit energy has been there for a long time, transmitted by many generations of ancestors and coming to Plum Village is to have a chance to see it; that you are governed by your habit energy, by the tendency to run all the time. You

are not capable of being in the here and the now in order to touch the wonders of life that are available.

We have plenty of chances to practice. We know we wash your clothes, you are your dishes, you sweep the ground, you tend the garden, there are many things that you can do, but don't do it the way they do it in the world. Make it into a practice, a good practice and you will be rewarded right away and you know that you are dealing with your habit energy. The habit energy says, quick, quick, go, quick, quick, do it right away! The deadline is close but the practice is telling you the opposite thing, don't run, enjoy it, the here and the now is the only thing you have, happiness cannot be possible outside the here and the now, so you have two things contradicting each other and that is why the word training means that you slowly get over the habit energy and give yourself another habit energy that is good. The habit energy that you want to cultivate is the capacity to be in the here and the now and live every moment of your daily life deeply. Rake the leaves, enjoy it! Cook the breakfast! Enjoy fully the act of cooking. Wash the dishes! Enjoy fully the act of washing.

In the Hermitage every day I wash the dishes, every day I boil the rice and I take care of the flowers, of the plants and my practice is to enjoy every minute while doing these things. Yes, to write a poem is wonderful, to write an article is wonderful, to give a Dharma talk is wonderful but it is equally wonderful to take care of the bush, to take care of the plants, to wash the dishes and so on. Because it is very enriching, it is very rewarding, it can bring you a lot of peace and joy and solidity.

We know that happiness would not be possible if we have no stability and solidity and that is why we have to cultivate our stability, our solidity and offer it to ourselves because without the ground of stability and solidity no real peace, no real happiness could be possible. That is why learning how to rake the leaves, learning how to sweep the ground, learning how to wash the dishes is very important. Don't say that sitting meditation is most important or walking meditation is most important, or listening to the Dharma talk is most important. You listen to the Dharma talk in order to be able to rake the leaves. You listen to the Dharma talk in order to be able to wash the dishes, properly and enjoy it.

And in Plum Village we have the advantage of having many brothers and sisters doing the same and when we see one of them doing that we are supported. They don't do anything. They just do it, they don't say anything to us; they just do it. And when we see them doing that we have a chance to go back to ourselves and do it too.

And the practicing community is a great gift, like the sunshine. Everyone in France, maybe a lot of French people have the sun today but maybe because many of do not have the capacity of going home to the here and the now that is why the sunshine does not mean much to them. But if you know how to breathe in and become aware of the sunshine, you have a different kind of sun, the sun is for you And not for those who are so busy, who get lost all the time in their worries, in the past, in the future. The moon is supposed to be everyone's but there are those of us who never see the moon, never profit from the moon, never enjoy the moon.

And we live in Plum Village together for a week, for a month or three months, for a year and we practice together. There are those of us who are quite happy, there are those of us who are not quite happy yet, the same environment, the same Sangha, the same practice and yet we receive differently the amount of happiness and peace and stability and joy. And what makes that difference? What makes the difference is our capacity to put into practice the teaching that is given. And the Buddha was quite clear on this, life is available only in the here and the now, with all its wonders, if you continue to run, these wonders of life are not yours. So stop! Smile to the sun, smile to the moon, smile to your brother or sisters and specially, smile to yourself.

Recognize that you are there. You need to be nourished by peace, by joy. You have deprived yourself of these elements. It is you who have deprived yourself of peace and joy and nourishment and healing. Now the Dharma is to help you to stop that course of living. Look at yourself, smile to yourself, be kind to yourself, treat yourself with the practice. Learn how

to walk, learn how to breathe and smile, learn how to rake the leaves on the front yard. It is very important. The Kingdom of God, the Buddha Land is right there for you to touch.

Bell

If you have observed the monks and the nuns, if you have observed them in Plum Village you will notice that while they walk they don't talk, when they talk they stop to talk and to listen, and after talking and listening they resume their walking. Why do they do like that? Because when they talk and listen they want to invest 100% of themselves into the act of talking and listening. That is why they don't talk any longer while they are walking; they want to invest themselves 100% in the act of walking. They want to make real steps, steps that can bring them stability, solidity, freedom because they know that stability, solidity is the ground of happiness so they walk in order to cultivate that and to enjoy it at the same time.

That is why, if you come to Plum Village following that kind of example you join the practice. Not talking during walking is not a rule because we don't want to be victims of rules, we don't want any rule at all, we just want to practice. If you don't talk, that is because we want to practice. It is not that talking is a crime. But if you talk during the practice you ruin the practice.

In the teaching of the Buddha to be attached to rules is something that you are not encouraged to do. We should look at it as a practice and not as rules, like the ten novice precepts that we have here that you have heard yesterday. These are not rules for the novice. They are not there in order to restrict the freedom the happiness of the novice. They are there to help the novice to lead the happy life of a novice. Because these precepts should be considered to be the practice of mindfulness and if you practice accordingly you preserve your freedom, your beauty, your happiness. And if you think that these ten things are rules you have to submit yourself to, you have to surrender yourself to, you don't get it, you don't get the real thing and that is why the Buddha said, don't be the slave of rules and rituals. Rituals and rules, we don't need them; we need only the practice.

When we enter the Dharma hall everyone stands up and joins the palms. That is not a rule, that is the practice. And when the teacher enters the hall he is not affected by the respect shown to him. He practices walking also, mindfully, the practice of mindful walking is his practice. Walking mindfully is his practice and standing up and breathing and showing respect is your practice. These two things are equally important. And if you look on it as a ritual you are wrong. If you look at it as a rule you are wrong, you have to look at it as your practice and good practice can be recognized. When the teacher walks he should be a free person, he is not affected by pride, complex of arrogance, that is his practice. Your practice is to be respectful to the teacher, to enjoy standing like this, to breathe in, to breathe out, and smile and touch the many generations of teachers in history. When you get in touch with your teacher you get in touch with his teacher, her teacher, you get in touch with many generations of teachers, you get in touch with the Buddha, so that is your practice.

That is why you don't complain that you have to stand too long and the teacher is walking too slowly. The teacher practices his practice and you practice your practice and everyone is profiting from the practice and you know whether your practice is correct or not. You know by yourself that the practice is making you happy, peaceful, solid. You know the teacher takes care of his practice and you take care of your practice and we should not look at it as a rule or a ritual, otherwise we are caught in forms of rituals and rules and the Buddha is against rituals, mere rituals and rules.

When you hold a glass of water and drink it mindfully, the act is so beautiful and it looks like a ritual, right? But the one who is holding the glass and drinking he does not have any intention of making it into a ritual, a performance. He just enjoys holding the glass and drinking. But because mindfulness is there, very deep, very strong, so the act looks like a ritual, but it is not ritual, it is the practice.

When you bow like this and you feel that your mind and your body are coming together in concentration, in mindfulness and you feel that you are totally present and you are oriented to something good, true and beautiful, the nature of enlightenment, the nature of awakening in

you, so you inherit, you profit from it and you don't think of it as a ritual. But if you do it like a machine and when you see someone and you just imitate them without understanding, that is a ritual, that is a ridiculous thing to do, entirely empty. That kind of ritual is entirely empty and we should not do it.

That is why in big retreats in North America we always have new people, sometimes 50 to 60 % of the people who join the retreat are new people and they are embarrassed, they think of it as a ritual, they are not comfortable. That is why I always begin by saying, to bow or not to bow that is not the question! And to bow that is a ritual, so don't be caught in a ritual. Practice. If you think that doing like this will bring you concentration, insight and reverence that makes you good, that makes you happy and then you do it and you are free from rituals, you are free from rules.

So the ten novice precepts are practices that aim at helping the novice to be free, to be happy, to be solid and if you consider the precepts as something that limits your freedom you are wrong, you are caught in rituals, you are caught in rules and that is against the Buddhist spirit. In the fifty one categories of mental formations there is one mental formation. It is described as a wholesome mental formation because there are unwholesome mental formations like anger, hatred, fear. They are not positive mental states but this mental formation is a good mental state. It can be translated as shame but it is very difficult to translate exactly. It means, you are ashamed of yourself when you realize that you don't practice as you should.

You don't need someone to tell you that you don't practice, you have got all the conditions for your success in the practice and yet you don't do it, and when you don't do it and every time you think of it you are ashamed. Please, help me to find the word in English. It means the same that happens when you confront another person. You see another person practicing, so well, so happy, so relieved and you feel ashamed in his or her presence.

If you are a Dharma teacher, or an apprentice Dharma teacher, or a future Dharma teacher you know that it would not be all right if you don't practice because you are sharing the Dharma. You are speaking in the name of the Buddha, the Bodhisattvas about the practice. You tell people to try to be mindful and to establish themselves in the here and the now and to touch the wonders of life in the here and now, to nourish themselves, to transform themselves and yet you don't do it, when you think of it, you have a sense of shame. That is a good mental formation, a wholesome mental formation because thanks to that mental formation you will change. You evolve, you become a better Dharma practitioner. That is why shame is the first of many wholesome formations.

People who don't have a sense of shame have no future. You should be ashamed of the fact that you don't practice when conditions favorable for the practice are all there within and around you. You have the teaching, you have got the instructions, you have got a place, you have got a house to live in, you have got food to eat, you have got brothers and sisters helping you, you have got a teacher, you have got every condition favorable for your practice and yet you don't practice. And every time you go back and see that situation and feel shameful that is a very good kind of energy that can transform you and make you into a better practitioner. All of us should be equipped by shame, that is a kind of cosmetic, a kind of adornment that every one needs. Adorn yourself with shame and then you will be a good teacher and then you will be a good student and then you will be a good Dharma teacher.

You have been given a chance to rake the leaves and you don't rake them as you should. You are given a chance to wash the dishes and yet you don't wash them as you should. You don't enjoy the practice of washing the dishes. You are given a chance to walk from your room to the meditation hall and you don't do it. You walk and yet you allow yourself to get caught in your anger, in your despair, in the past, in the future and shame is something that can rescue you from the state of being stubborn in your practice. That is why the Buddha said, equip yourself with shame and then you will become a good practitioner, a Bodhisattva and that is why shame is the number one of the good mental formations.

And you need another person to tell you the truth, to stand in front of you in order to have shame because you are capable of having that mental formation. Every time we see another



person in front of you and you feel ashamed that you cannot do like him or like his expectation of him and then you feel ashamed also.

Let us discuss about the student and the teacher relationship. Shame, plays a very important role. The teacher should be ashamed when he or she faces his disciple. He has to ask the question whether he is worthy of his disciple, his life, his practice, whether it is worthy of his disciple. Am I a worthy person in relationship with my disciple? And if the teacher does not have shame in him he is not a good teacher. He teaches things that he doesn't practice and the student also, when he faces his teacher he should have shame. The teacher has done his best in order to offer the teaching, to support him, to love him and yet he has not made use of this and become a good practitioner. He is ashamed every time he is in the presence of his teacher. So shame is helping both of them. Am I worthy of my teacher? Am I worthy of my disciple? That is the function of shame.

Now, let us talk about the relationship between big brother and younger brother, or big sister and younger sister in the Dharma. Because we all expect our brother or sister to practice, whether they are senior or junior. As a big sister we should be able to feel shame when we see a young sister practicing solidly, so well, and when you look at your sister in that way, with a sense of shame, you evolve, you become a better sister. And when you are a young sister and if you look at your big sister you know that your big sister is expecting you to practice well the mindfulness trainings, the mindful manners. She has done everything she could in order to help you, to support you to practice and yet you revolt against her, you don't know how to deepen your practice and in a way you betray her, you are unkind to your big sister.

The same is true of the brothers. A big brother is someone who knows that since he has been in the Dharma longer than his younger brother his practice should be good enough in order to serve as a model or as a support for his younger brother and if he does not behave well, he does not practice well, every time he sees his younger brother, the sense of shame will help him to improve. And every time he sees his younger brother he has an opportunity to go back to the practice and do it much better. And the younger brother also should know that in order to be a good young brother he should get down to the practice and by practicing he is making his big brother happy and he can even help his big brother. His big brother may have more difficulties within himself and blaming him is not helpful. Practice better and then you help your big brother.

When the monks and the nuns see a lay person, because in Vietnam and in many other countries the lay people support the monks with shelter and food. Every day the monks have to go and beg for the food and the lay people expect the monks to practice. So, when we hold the bowl of food and we do the five contemplations, we visualize where the food has come from and we see the earth, the sky, the hard work of the lay person, the love, the support of the lay person, we are ashamed that we don't practice well and because of that sense of shame we know how to eat mindfully and eating mindfully is already a good response to the lay person. When a lay person comes to the temple that is a good opportunity for the monks and the nuns to reflect and to nourish his/her shame in order to become a good practitioner.

So every day we have a lot of opportunities to see each other and we can have an impact on each other with our practice. In the world, our professors teach but they don't necessarily have to do it, what they need is to deliver the teaching and they get paid for it. They teach what they have got in terms of knowledge, conceptual knowledge, but teaching the Dharma is different. Whether in a monastery or in a Buddhist institute you just don't give this conceptual teaching. You have to teach with your practice, with your experience. That is why a Buddhist institute should be organized in such a way that the practice should go together with the classroom.

Even if you are a young sister very new to the practice, even if you are a young brother still new to the practice, but if you practice well, if you know how to walk mindfully, how to rake the leaves mindfully. You are already a teacher even if you don't actually deliver a speech,

because you embody the living teaching and the teacher is in the student and the student is in the teacher: interbeing. We have to recognize both in us. We have a teacher within and we also have a student within, at the same time, and that helps us to grow in the practice.

In fact, it is wonderful to have a place to be in, a place where conditions are favorable for the practice of transformation and healing. The earth, the sky, many living beings have come together to make the place available to us. The place has teachers, it has big brothers and sisters, the place has friends and supporters. We actually have every favorable condition for our practice and if we allow time to go by like that without getting down to the real practice we are being unkind to earth, sky, to teachers, to brothers, to sisters and to numerous living beings and we should be ashamed of that nature of unkindness in us and that is why we should wake each other up into that sense of shame so that everyone of us will be a better practitioner and we will be able to support each other in the practice.

When we are ordained as a lay person, upasika, upasaka, when we are ordained as a novice monk or nun we know that we are still new in the practice and should rely in our big brothers and sisters in the Dharma in order for our practice to take root. Sometimes our big Dharma brothers and our big Dharma sisters are still very young, much younger than us and we have the tendency to say that, well, they're just kids, they don't know much about life and they cannot really play the role of big brothers and big sisters for us. If you have the kind of thinking, you are wrong.

Many of us have realized that if we are ordained one day earlier we profit from that day. The earlier you get ordained the better because the day you ordain you have the opportunity to end, to realize, to recognize the habit energy. You want to shut the door behind you and you want just to go ahead and the process of transformation and healing can begin right away even if you don't know it.

Being in the Sangha as a member, as a full member and allowing the Sangha to embrace you, to protect you, to transform you is very important, whether you are a lay person or you are a monastic. You take refuge in the Sangha and even if you think that much has not been done or realized in you a lot is being done at the same time.

We have a sister who belongs to the generation of the Apple trees. She came from Canada, and after she went home and she thought that her practice was still very weak. She did not know the transformation that had taken place within her life and when she arrived at her home in Canada people looked at her with different eyes. They saw her peaceful, solid, smiling, fresh and she commands a lot of respect. The people who used to deal with her as a kid now began to deal with her with a lot of respect. She was so surprised to see how much people suffer! How much people suffer in her family, in her greater family, in her former environment in Canada. Two years ago it was the same but she didn't know it, didn't see it and now after twenty two months of practicing as a nun she went back and recognized all their suffering and at the same time they look at her and see how transformed she is just after twenty two months of being a nun. During that time she didn't think she had made a big progress at all. She just allowed herself to be in the Sangha, embraced by the Sangha, transported by the Sangha and the transformation just takes place slowly, like that. She has transformed but she didn't know it. She met a lady who suffered very much because of her situation and her husband and that lady used to look at her as a little girl but now that lady saw her and she was deeply inspired and she wanted to leave everything in order to become a nun. When her husband learned about it he was furious. He considered the young nun as his enemy who was about to take away his wife. Two years ago he used to look at her as a kid, as a little girl, but how could a little girl have such an impact on his wife? How could a kid have such an impact on a person like his wife? He had tried his best and he had not had any impact on his wife yet. In that state of anger he came to see her and she was smiling and inviting him to come to Plum Village, both of them.

It is not the amount of experience in society that counts, it is not the amount of knowledge that we have got in school that counts, it is the amount of training that you have to consider. So a very young sister, a very young brother that has entered the monastic life before you, you

have to really look at her as your big sisters, to look at him as your big brother and the notion of seniorship in the Dharma is very important. So, even if you are sixty and you just received the novice precepts you have to look upon the sixteen year old novice as your big brother or big sister. This is a good training. That is why every Sunday we sit in order of ordination in order to remind people that this is the practice of seniority, a long tradition of Buddhist practice. We learn the spirit of democracy, we try to encourage everyone to express himself/herself concerning how to make the life of the community happier, better organized. We encourage those who are reluctant to express themselves, we try to train them for them to be ready to contribute their insight. We learn to listen to everyone in the Sangha so that everyone can have a chance to express themselves, that is our learning about the spirit of democracy.

Another practice is deep listening, patience, and also encouraging speech but we still practice the spirit of seniorship because even if those monks and nuns are young they have been there longer in the practice and we should try to remember they are our big brothers in the Dharma, they are our big sisters in the Dharma and this is very helpful. Not to them, but to us. The younger brothers, the younger sisters in the Dharma we have to consult them because in them there is the presence of long time-wisdom transmitted by many generations of teachers. And you will be surprised to see that even if the novice is still young you can learn a lot from him or from her. And even if you compare your practice with his or hers you will see that your steps may not be as solid as hers, your breath may not be as mindful as his and out of that you have a kind of authentic respect because that respect is not for her, as a young novice, but it is for the Buddha because the young novice is the continuation of the Buddha. And you can see your teacher in the young novice because in every cell of her body, of his body there is the presence of the teacher in it.

In the Hermitage something just happened in the last two weeks. It makes me think very deeply. I have several pots of chrysanthemums in my veranda and among them there is a pot of white, pure white chrysanthemums, about twenty big chrysanthemums. I have been taking good care of that pot of chrysanthemums, I put in my veranda about eight pots of chrysanthemums. The veranda is made of glass and the sun rises from this direction and the sun is setting in this direction. The pot of white chrysanthemums I put here and next to it is a pot of cyclamen, what is the word in English for cyclamen? Of violet flowers. And over here, another pot of chrysanthemums, violet, about two or three big flowers like this, as big as this pot and this second cyclamen is also violet. And this is pure white. And for my chrysanthemums I don't have to water from the top, because under each pot I have a container like this. I just pour the water and the roots over here naturally absorb the water. I do that every two days and they know the about of water they can absorb every day.

My door is here, I enter here from the Hermitage and I can enter here from the front yard and I observe and I have a hammock hung in here. You know everything now (laughter). Usually I sit in the hammock, I look and enjoy all the flowers in this direction but one day I sit and I look here and I saw that the white chrysanthemums are becoming violet. The fact is that the violet colors reflected into the glass and the setting sun is sending rays in this direction and this is receiving the sunshine. If you come to the Hermitage now you will see that the ten or twelve big chrysanthemums on this side have become half violet and the ten on this side are pure white.

The sixteen new novices can come and look. It is amazing! It is very beautiful! You don't have to do anything, just allow yourself to be in the Sangha. If you have trust you allow the Sangha to embrace you, to transport you in its spirit and energy and you will be transformed. So trust is very important, you have to believe, you have to have confidence. We all know that members of our Sangha are not perfect, nothing is perfect in this world, but the Sangha is important. I told you some time ago that last fall I went to Omega Institute and during walking meditation I saw a beautiful branch of autumn leaves, so beautiful, so harmonious. I came close and I saw that the leaves were not perfect. All the leaves were perforated a little

bit because of the insects or because of the fungi, but if you look at the branch they are so beautiful because of the harmony in it. So the Sangha is like that. Members of the Sangha may not be perfect but if we learn how to live in the Sangha with harmony and trust, each one in his/her position, that Sangha can perform a miracle, everyone who comes and touches the Sangha can be transformed.

The environment can have a very strong impact on the genetics, the culture of spirituality is transforming the cells in our body, the genes in our body. It is true! When you look at the white chrysanthemums becoming violet you see the wonders of life, you see the impact of culture and spirituality on the genetic heritage of mankind. So the Buddha has transmitted to us many genes, many elements of the spirituality of culture that will continue to have a deep impact on our lives. We have to be able to allow these elements to penetrate for our transformation and for our healing and the Sangha is the agent. The Sangha represents the Buddha, the Sangha practicing always the career of the Buddha and the Dharma, so having trust in the Sangha it is very important because the Sangha is the Buddha. And I have said several times that the next Buddha may take the form of a Sangha and each one of us can be a cell of that body, that Buddhakaya, that Buddha body.

We should give up what we consider to be our knowledge, our experience, because that knowledge has not helped very much. That experience has not helped very much, we still suffer a lot that is why we should be ready to give up in order to be free for the penetration of the Dharma, of the Sangha, of the Buddha to become possible and taking refuge in the Sangha, trust in the Sangha, allow the Sangha to transport you, to carry you. It is a comfortable feeling, a comfortable practice. And taking refuge in the Sangha is not a declaration of faith: it is our daily practice.

## Questions & Answers

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on Dec 9, 1999 in Plum Village, France.

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Today is the 9th of December 1999, we are in the Lower Hamlet and it is time for us to ask questions concerning the Dharma talks that have been given in the last few weeks. You may ask in French, or in English or in Vietnamese. Let us take advantage of it.

Q: When I was in high school I took a psychology class and my psychology teacher was a behaviorist. And one aspect of the behaviorist school that he talked about was the idea that... he liked to explain that we didn't have any free will, and that everything that happened to us was determined by our outside environment, sort of predestination in a way, one domino falls and the rest of everything comes into place. My question is, I am wondering if Buddhism supports that notion because the idea of emptiness and interbeing seem to point in that direction for me, I am not sure. In your commentary on the Prajnaparamita sutra you talked about how we are empty because we are full of everything else, and that basically was what interbeing was, in a sense. So what I am wondering is, is there free will that makes the determination between which paths we take, and if there is a free will how is that reconciled with the idea of emptiness? Because if there is something that is inside that is screening, the outside environment it seems like not only am I a product of everything else that is outside but there is also something that is inside that is propelling something that I consider myself forward. To put it in the most basic terms, are emptiness and free will mutually exclusive?

A: Emptiness is made of free will and free will of emptiness. And that is the meaning of emptiness. It is like the right is made of the left, the left is made of the right and if you want to say that only one exists there is not emptiness. So you can answer the question of free will by yourself, with your direct experience of emptiness because we should live the insight of emptiness and not just talk about it. When you come to Plum Village you are given an opportunity to practice mindfulness, you are given equal opportunity. Like when you walk you can choose to walk in mindfulness, when you wash the dishes you may like to wash in mindfulness, and then there are brothers and sisters who are doing the same. So you have many opportunities to put into practice the teaching of mindful living. When you walk with mindfulness you become free and freedom is something that you can experience. Because you can walk as a slave being caught by the past, by the future, by your anger, by your afflictions but you can go back to your in-breath, out-breath and walk as a free person.

So freedom is a reality, not just a notion and it is a function of your practice and there are those of us who practice better than others and this alone proves that free will is possible. In the light of the practice this seems to be the only kind of freedom that we can get and if we know how to inherit, to make use of this freedom you will have a larger freedom which will be the fruit of this practice of freedom. Looking back at yourself, you know that to be free or not to be free depends on you to a large extent. So, go back to your breath and breathing in liberate yourself. This is something that we can do at any time of the day and we don't have to be caught in the speculation about whether freedom exists or not because we know very well that slavery is a reality but also freedom is a reality and that is the meaning of our getting together and leaning on each other for the practice.

Q: Je ne voudrais surtout pas paraître prétentieux, mais il me semble que ce que nous lisons, ce que nous entendons, ait une connotation un peu pessimiste parce qu'il est question du manas 6-1 et 2, les deux fonctions du manas que vous avez noté 6-1/6-2, mais le paragraphe 6-2 ne parle que de manas passionné, j'ai entendu et j'ai lu d'autre part cette strophe qui est affichée aussi dans différents mots, vivant dans le monde sans être affecté par les afflictions du monde, toute souffrance teinte, le bodhisattva passe majestueusement sur les vagues de la naissance et de la mort. 頻 Je pense que il lui conviendrait, la lumière de ce que nous avons lu ce matin, de lire: vivant dans le monde sans être affecté par les afflictions du monde, toute

passion teinte, parce que les souffrances sont les fruits de la passion. N'est-il pas possible alors de penser que ce paragraphe 6-2 c'est dire le manas passionné, qui par la pratique du bodhisattva, la pratique assidue, continue, efficace du bodhisattva va perdre ses quatre passions, sans cela il y aurait on pourrait imaginer peut-être un paragraphe 6-3 qu'on pourrait

imaginer, permettez-moi de le lire□: 6-3 est le manas de fonctionnement du bodhisattva qui a teint les quatre passions. Il serait le support des connaissances obtenues par la vue juste, le support des actions justes, des pensées justes, des perceptions justes ce qui fait que la vue sur le moi même serait teinte. Mais le bodhisattva qui vit dans le monde a besoin du manas pour écouter, pour sentir, pour goûter, pour marcher, pour dormir. Est-ce que cette vue serait correcte?

A: Manas is a kind of perception characterized by misunderstanding, by ignorance and therefore based on manas in order to act, to speak and to think you make a lot of mistakes and that is why the bodhisattva in the process of her practice learns to act, to think and to speak on the basis of wisdom, the wisdom of non discrimination, the wisdom that reveals that there is no separated self. So it is perfectly possible for anyone to continue acting and helping and serving without manas, because without manas you have something much better, that is the wisdom of non discrimination (Sanskrit) and that is to replace manas. That does not mean that you have to throw manas away in order to have non discriminative wisdom because it is manas that will be transformed into the wisdom of non discrimination. When you have a cup of water that is not drinkable and you throw it away and then you have no water at all you have to seek ways to transform that water into something that you can drink. That is what it means by transformation so if you are in a desert and if you are dying of thirst and then if you have a glass of muddy water you should not throw it away, you have to keep it and transform it into drinkable water. So manas within yourself, there is wisdom in it, so the fact is not throwing away something but to transform it.

The other day Jacques also presented a question in a written form, he said, because I was drawing that circle representing alaya serving as the cause for all defiled Dharma, this is effect and this is the base for this manifestation, but when we look deeply into this manifestation we can also see the base in it and that is why I propose to wipe away the outer circle because the outer circle can be seen already in the inner circle. So his question is, if this is defiled Dharma and then where can we get the purity of the Tathagata, the ground of enlightenment? so this half moon should be retained in order to provide us with our opportunity for enlightenment and purification and so on. So he did not feel comfortable when I wiped this out. This is a very typical kind of question, very typical kind of thinking based on dualism, because when you think of something as defiled, as negative, you immediately want to throw it away. And that is a strong tendency in many people and now we must learn how to think in a non dualistic way, it is defiled, it is negative, but you have to keep it and transform it because out of it there is nothing else. It is like the glass of muddy water, if you throw it out you don't have water, you have to transform.

So all the defiled Dharmas, all the negative things contain within themselves the positive ground, the ground of enlightenment. That is why it was so clear that in the beginning you recognize as e but a little later you recognize that c is in e. And if c is in e already, why do you have to keep c outside the e, so the practice is how to learn to think, to speak, and to see things in non-dual terms. Because the other day Thay already talked about the top soil and that if we looked deeply into the top soil we see the green leaves and if we look deeply into the green leaves we can see the top soil in it. Because without the top soil there would be no green leaves and if there are no green leaves there is no top soil, so they contain each other - that is inter containing, interbeing, that is an art of being, an art of talking and we have to get used to it. Ça va, Jacques, c'est clair? Another question? OK.

Q: Dear Thay, because the alaya is everywhere and there is non duality, and in the leaf you can see the soil. I can recognize an enlightened being, I can maybe see him, he is part of me somehow, how come he cannot enlighten me. Everything has to come from me and how come there is no interaction possible on this if I am part of everything and everything is part of me. How come?

A: When you look deeply you will be able to remove the notion of inside and outside and the discrimination between you and him, you and her will be removed because the inside contains the outside and etc. I would like to bring you a very concrete example. You are a member of the Sangha living in the Sangha. You are a monastic or a lay person living in the Sangha. You may have the impression that your Sangha does not support you enough. The Sangha does not care about you, and you believe that until the Sangha comes and supports you and takes care of you, you will not be able to make progress in the practice. Sometime a monastic will think like that. Sometime a lay person will think like that. She or he will wait for an act, an attitude from the Sangha, from the Teacher in order for her/him to do all right. Right? But at the same time that person knows that the Sangha is within him/her, and if that person knows how to take care of the Sangha, and the Teacher in him/her she will be doing all right, there is no inside or outside and discrimination and blaming will cease to exist.

We have been in Plum Village some twenty years and every time I practice walking meditation I always pay attention to the trees that we have planted. Many of the pine trees have been planted on the first or second year of Plum Village and I use to stop and look at the cedar and the pine tree and smile to them. I tend to look at them as practitioners, a monk, a nun or a lay person and I say: this novice is sixteen years old and is doing very well and I touch the branch of the pine and I smile at the pine. I noticed that when you are planted as a small tree it is very easy for you. Taking roots in the soil is much easier than if you are planted as a big tree. You know, in the Upper Hamlet there were five or six pines that belonged to the category called umbrella pine and we took them home one day, quite big, about three meters. And it was more difficult to take care than when you plant small pines. I remember we had difficulties the first year, the second and the third year because there was a lot of wind in the Upper Hamlet, and we did not try to help the pines to stand firm against the wind. That is why every winter the pine would go like this and then the soil is very wet, very soft and the wind is capable of making the pine incline like this. So when the rain stopped we used the tractor to pull it back to the upright position. And during two or three years we did like that, and that is why this pine was not doing very well in the first three years.

That is why when we planted the three big cedars we tried our best, and asked a professional to help us pin it down with three very solid sticks. That is why after the second year we could take out the sticks and the cedars became very strong.

It is the same thing with a practitioner, if you allow yourself to be blown by the wind. If your practice is off and on – you stay for a few months and then you leave, and then you come back for a few months and you leave, it is like allowing the wind to upset you, to make you lose your stability, your solidity. And the condition of non-interruption is not here for you to grow as a good practitioner. You may have the impression that the teacher does not support you that the sangha does not support you. The tree may think that the soil is not kind to it, but the soil is always there supporting all the trees, with a non-discriminative attitude. The soil provides the tree with the basic conditions, opening herself up to receive the tree, embrace the tree. But if the tree does not try to get rooted as soon as possible, then the soil cannot do anything. So to cultivate solidity, to cultivate breathing, to cultivate taking refuge in the sangha is your practice. If you go back and take advantage of the soil in you, take advantage of the sangha in you then the rooting will take place, and if the rooting takes place you'll be a very beautiful tree.

If you do not allow yourself to be rooted in the Sangha, if you don't allow the Sangha to be rooted in you your practice will not bring you anywhere at all. So even if you do not practice

a lot of walking meditation, or sitting meditation, or chanting, even if you don't learn a lot of scriptures. But you just spend your time with your brothers and sisters in an intelligent way so that your sisters and brothers are rooted in you and you are rooted in your sisters and brothers you are doing it right. And one week, two weeks is enough to let you know that you have made progress, so we should not say that spending time with your brothers and sisters is a waste of time, no. Your time is to do that, your time is to do that, to get rooted in the Sangha and to allow the Sangha to be rooted in yourself, this is very important. That was the practice of the Buddha, that was the practice of the monks and the nuns at the time of the Buddha. So if your practice does not give you that kind of rooting you should know that practice is not very helpful. Even drinking tea together, or washing the dishes together, or working in the garden together. All these things can be considered to be right practice because they help you to be rooted, it helps the Sangha to be rooted in you. And with the insight of interbeing, it means the insight of non discrimination, you see that the outside is the inside and the inside is the outside. You can think that the soil is always trying to help, the sun is always trying to help, but if the tree does not try its best to root in the soil and profit from the sunshine, the sunshine cannot do anything, the soil cannot do anything. I hope my answer was helpful to you. Happy Rooting! That is our wish! Commenta se traduit em francais? Enracinement heureux!

Q: Dear Thay, from your teaching I learned that the alaya, the ground of everything, is not an immobile thing, it is a kind of floating stream. When I pass away what will be the interplay between my manovijnana(store consciousness), my manas, and my citta(mind consciousness)? Thank you.

A: Can you wait? (laughter)

Q: Yes, I can wait! (laughter)

A: I think it is very important to know that you are passing away right this moment. Life and death are taking place right now, right here and life and death as you see it are only complementary things, things that make each other possible because dying makes the living possible. It is very important to learn to look deeply so that you may see that in this very moment you are dying and you are being reborn. It is very important. And this is by practicing every day and this will bring you another way of looking. In the Tibetan tradition, you know, when the Teacher passes away you have to wait for a few years and you go look for a little boy, may be a little girl and to recognize your Teachers continuation in that little boy or little girl. And in the Tibetan tradition you may practice some kind of testing to know if that little boy is a reincarnation of your teacher or not. So you bring a number of things that have been used by your Teacher in his lifetime and then you bring together other things and you allow the little boy to pick up one of the things and if he picks up the right things you are sure that he is a continuation of your former Teacher. I like that very much, it is very poetic, very charming practice and idea.

But I always tell my students that they don't need to wait until I pass away in order to look for that little boy or little girl, they have to do it now because I have already been reborn, in this very moment, not only as a little boy but as many little boys, not as a little girl, but as many little girls at the same time. I myself recognize them, not all of them, but some of them. And there are continuations that I have not actually seen with my eyes but I know they are there. So I see the fact that I am dying every moment and I am being reborn every moment and I feel good about it because I don't see myself as being limited in this body. Not only in this body, not only in the body that will appear after I pass away, but in many bodies at this very time. Again about the rooting: when I have a disciple practicing well I see myself rooting in him/her and I see him rooting in me. And when the disciple is rooted in me he has a lot, he is in touch with all generations of ancestors, he feels that he is very solid, he has a background that is so solid, many, many generations of teachers are in him as supporters.



So my disciples have lots of advantages when they take root in me. And I get a lot also when I am rooted in him/her because when I see that I am rooted in him/her I feel that I have the future, whole future for me. I feel young, I feel very young, I feel that I am just born, I am being born every moment so the insight of non discrimination, the insight of non interruption is there and that makes me not afraid of death. For I know it cannot do anything to us, death cannot disrupt anything, because even right now the continuation has taken place in many, many forms. And if you look at the Buddha you see that the Buddha is there today in every one of us. The Buddha has a life called the life of wisdom. The mindfulness of the Buddha is his body and his wisdom is his life. If we touch ourselves deeply we see that the body and the life of the Buddha continue today and tomorrow. We can touch the Buddha right here and right now. And later on when you learn more about alayavijnana, you see that alayavijnana it is not only an individual thing it is a collective thing as well. And you will have another notion of alaya that will be closer to reality; that is why I said, can you wait? Further on you will see the teaching on alayavijnana.

Q: Speaking of passing away, my father passed away two weeks ago today, and he died with a lot of anger towards my mother. They are divorced. I think he had a lot of anger in general, my mother just happened to be a particular focus. Looking deeply through the practice I see that I am my father and so I have my fathers anger. And so it is my task to transform that anger for him, for myself, for my wife, for all of us, I wonder if you can offer some words of encouragement. Thank you.

A: You have enough wisdom to start the practice. It is very important to see that your father is always there within yourself and every step you make is for your father, and for his father, and the father of his father also. Every breath taken in mindfulness, every step taken in mindfulness, every smile you can produce is for all of them, so that transformation can take place in every moment. I also practice like that. The time when I practice lying down in a most comfortable way, not doing anything at all, completely at rest, I say: Daddy, let us stay in this position, let us breath and enjoy it. We don't have much to do. You can see your father responding to you in yourself and he has a chance now to stop, to relax, and not to do too much like he used to do. Sometimes I say: Mummy, let us sit still and not worry about anything, we have a chance. Sometimes I practice with my Teacher, I practice with the Buddha. It is wonderful to be aware that everyone is practicing with you because you contain a multitude. You are large, you contain multitudes. When I make steps like this you can visualize that all generations of my ancestors are taking steps with me. The amount of freedom I enjoy and the amount of stopping I enjoy is being shared by all of them. It is wonderful! Transformation and healing is possible every moment. It is very nice to practice for your father, for your mother, and for their father for their mother also. That is why to me it is a great happiness to be able to encounter the Dharma, and when you encounter the Sangha you have an opportunity to encounter the Dharma and the Dharma can change everything. And when you are changed, when you are transformed you become an instrument for change and transformation for many living beings. If you have that kind of desire, if you are motivated by that desire to help, to change you are already a bodhisattva, the energy of the Buddha. You are so alive because you are inhabited by the kind of motivation, that kind of desire. And being with the Sangha, allow yourself to be transported by the Sangha, allowing the Sangha to be rooted in you is a very important practice. Every one of us needs that practice, Thay needs that practice, he needs to be rooted deeply in the Sangha, and he needs the Sangha to be deeply rooted in him, because his happiness has been made of it and will be made of it.

This morning I was practicing walking meditation in the Hermitage and I thought that it was so wonderful that as an animal we have had the opportunity to stand upright on our feet and liberate completely our hands. When we were still chimpanzees we had to walk with our hands. At that time we were able already to use our hands, we could use a stone in order to crush the nut we wanted to eat, we were able to use a stick in order to get the things that are a little bit further, but chimps they had to use their arms a lot in order to walk. But three million

and one half years ago we were able to stand up and completely liberate our arms. We did not use our arms for walking any more, and beginning at that time we began to evolve. With our two arms two hands totally free we can do so many things and our fingers grew and we got a lot of capacity with our two hands. The skillfulness of our hands has helped our brain to develop in a very, very quick way. It took only three million and five hundred thousand years in order for our brain to be three times bigger. Three and one half million years seems to be long but in terms of evolution it is nothing.

At the time we stood up, homo-erectus, that is the name, and as our brain began to develop we continued to get knowledge, we became homo-sapiens and since our brain has doubled and trebled, it needs a lot more oxygen, a lot more sugar. We know that the brain takes up at least 1/5 of the nutrition from our eating because we spend a lot of energy for our brain. Oxygen, glucose and other things. With the presence of the Buddha, and the people who know how to cultivate mindfulness, we become a kind of species called homo-conscious.

We are capable of walking like this and being aware of every step we make. The chimps did not know how to do it, they walk because they want to get something to eat over there. They could never be aware of the step they make. Now I am capable of being in the here and the now and focusing one hundred per cent of my attention to the fact of walking like this, I become free, it is wonderful. And suddenly the Kingdom of God, suddenly the Buddha Land, is available to me because I am conscious. Economically speaking, a step made like this is not very productive, but spiritually speaking it is very rewarding and brings you a lot of happiness. And in terms of evolution this is a wonderful manifestation. It is not that in the chimps there is no alayavijnana, but that in that manifestation conditions are not sufficient for that kind of delight, that kind of penetration, that kind of enlightenment to be expressed. It is already there, but it needs more conditions, so the fact that we are able to stand up and free our hands, the fact that our brains have trebled, the fact that there is a Teacher to tell us how to breathe in and breathe out mindfully and touch the ground with mindfulness. It is wonderful, we belong to a race, the third one, and if we continue to walk like that, the process of evolution will continue.

You know, the way we manage our fingers has made a great impact on our intelligence, on the development of our mind. In Buddhism we see that there are many positions of the hand called mudras. When the Buddha gave a Dharma talk he used this mudra: the first truth, the second truth, the third truth and by using his hands like this his ideas become clearer, his insight deeper. So our hand is an extension of our brain. It is our hands that have nourished our brain, have helped our brain to develop and they inter are. Our intelligence helped our hands to adapt. Look at the baby learning how to grasp things. By using our hands we know that our hands are an extension of our brains, and if we have an instrument like a stick or a stone, the stick and the stone become an extension of our mind. Now we have the computer. The computer is an extension of our hand and of our mind too. That is evolution.

The same thing will happen to our feet, because our feet were used only to help us move from one place to another. But now we have another function for our feet, not just getting there but just walking for the sake of walking only. This function is very important, touching the Kingdom of God, touching Nirvana, touching the Buddha Land, you need your feet in order to do that. If you use your feet like that, you know that in your former times when you were a chimp you didn't do it. So it is wonderful just to walk and to focus your mindfulness on the fact that you are using your feet to touch the realm of enlightenment. The Kingdom of God, the Pure Land can bring you a lot of happiness, a lot of pleasure and the wonderful thing is that you can do it today. You can touch the Kingdom of God today, you can touch the Buddha Land today, you can touch the depths of yourself today just moving your feet. Those kind of feet are biologically possible, those kind of feet are spiritually possible, because the Buddha feet have been transmitted to you. You now know how to walk mindfully and enjoy every step you make. Do use your Buddha feet otherwise you would not be very different from a chimpanzee.



## Living in the Spirit of Non-self

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on December 16, 1999 in Plum Village, France.

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Dear Friends, today is the 16th December, 99 and we are in the New Hamlet. We know how important it is to practice taking Refuge in the Sangha. In order to have a Sangha we should learn how to build one and the best way to build one is to learn to live in harmony with the Sangha in the spirit of non self. So building a Sangha also means living with the Sangha. If you are lucky to be born in a family where everyone considers themselves as practitioners, Buddhist practitioners, you may like to transform your family into a small Sangha, practicing with Buddhist terminology and so on. But if you do not have the fortune of being born in a family where everyone accepts the way of life of Buddhism, then you may like to build a Sangha also, but not with Buddhist terminology, rituals and so on. It is possible to convince everyone to adapt to art of mindful living. To me, all Buddhist terms can be translated into non-Buddhist terms. We have been very successful in doing so. When you study the Five Mindfulness Trainings you don't see the words Buddha, Dharma, Sangha in it and the Five Mindfulness Trainings are in plain, secular language.

When you say, I take Refuge in the Buddha, it sounds Buddhist. But if you say, I have confidence in my capacity of being mindful, of being awake. I trust in my capacity of being there, in the here and the now. I trust my capacity of being understanding and compassionate. That is the equivalent of, 'I take Refuge in the Buddha', I trust Buddhahood in me, I trust my capacity of waking up, of being able to live in the here and the now. So it is entirely possible for you to use non-Buddhist language in order to express the insight and the practice of Buddhism. So even if your son, your daughter, does not like Buddhism you can still offer them the art of mindful living. That can bring a lot of happiness to you and to your family, transforming your family into a Sangha. You don't call it a Sangha, just a family, where everyone knows how to live in such a way that communication is possible, joy and peace become possible.

The people in the Lower Hamlet or in the New Hamlet may have noticed the way the monastics, the nuns, here take care of the subas who came from Vietnam. Some of you may think that they give too much care to the subas but that is their practice in the tradition. We take care of our senior teachers in such a way because that is not only taking care of them but taking care of ourselves. And when you take care of your teacher that way, your senior teachers that way, you have an opportunity to express your love and appreciation and yet you get a lot. Maybe the people who are being taken care of don't get as much as you do because by doing so you show your compassion, your appreciation, your love, your care and it is you who profits the most from your act. And so happiness is not an individual matter. You make the other person happy and then happiness will return to you, like this, right away.

Suppose you go home and take care of your mother the way the nuns here take care of the superior nuns. Not as a duty, but as something you like to do. You know you are a continuation of your mother and you would like to take care of your mother inside of you and around you. Just take care like that, and that is not a loss of time; that is not losing your time, your time is to do that. Expressing love in concrete terms, and then you see that you are the person who is happy because you have the insight that your mother is you. You are just the continuation of your mother and making your mother happy it means making yourself happy. So I don't think that nuns in the New Hamlet are thinking that is a duty they have to do because the subas have come from Vietnam and they have to treat them with utmost care. That is just their tradition, the practice, and when you practice like that you are happy. And why don't we do that with our father, our mother, senior members of our family. If we take care of them like that, they will see that you are them and they are you, non-discrimination,

and suddenly your family becomes a Sangha because we have to remember always that happiness is not an individual thing.

And that we can see in many things, as we observe in our body there are so many cells! The cells in our body operate not on the base of duty but they just enjoy operating like that. The lungs are doing their best in order to renew the blood. With the intake of oxygen they do not say, "You the blood, you need me in order to be red again, to be oxygenated again, and you have to be thankful to me." Lungs never think like that! It is their pleasure to breathe in and breathe out and offer oxygen to the blood cells. And the blood cells, they go back to the other cells and they release the oxygen and they release their nutriments, and they don't say, "Well we traveled a lot in the body in order to bring you oxygen and you should be grateful to me! I have done too much, now it is time for me to retire." The blood cells don't think like that, they just enjoy doing that. There is no discrimination at all in our body and we see that the insight of non-self, the insight of interbeing can be seen just by observing how the cells in our body operate. If you are a scientist observing the way the human body operates, you can see very well that everything is operating on the insight of non-self, non-discrimination and that every cell of your body has the wisdom of non-discrimination.

When you observe a beehive, you see the same thing. You don't see a chief, a boss directing things. You be number one and you do this for me, and you be number two and you have to go in that direction and get that pollen for me. There is no chief at all, there is no director. The queen bee is not a director, she is not the king, she is not really the queen, her duty is just to offer the eggs for the next generation of bees, she is not really a directress. And yet in the beehive every bee behaves perfectly and they don't have to tell each other how they do it. The way they live their daily lives, the way they live, the way they act is their message, and they continue to communicate by the way they are and the way they do things. Sometimes a bee will go back to the beehive and begin to dance. That is their own way of expressing to the other bees, indicating the direction where they can get more pollen - the dance of the bees.

Also, if you observe the termites, you see that they are wonderful. They always work as a team, they don't have a director either and the queen of the termites also has only one duty; to produce eggs for the next generation of termites. They are very talented workers. They even create air conditioners in the place where they live. They are organized perfectly and there is a lot of intelligence, a lot of wisdom in the way the bees and the termites organize their community. No-one gives any orders at all and communications go very well.

Termites do communicate with each other and bees also communicate very well with each other. Scientists notice that there are chemicals that radiate from each individual termite as means of communications. Not only chemicals, but the way termites move around and perform an act is considered to be a means of communication. And all other termites, all other bees are open to receive this kind of information and they just act, responding in a perfect way. No one needs to tell the other one you should behave like this or like that. There's harmony that you can see among the termites and among the bees, and scientists who observe them marvel at the way they operate. And now there's a science called neuroscience, they study the brain and the neuroscientists have discovered very much the same thing. There is no self, there is no chief, there is no director operating in the brain, there is only individual brain cells called neurons. When scientists look deeply into the way neurons act, they see that neurons communicate with each other very well. The individual neuron is linked to all other neurons in the brain so that communication can happen all the time and neurons are responding to each other in a very harmonious way and they don't need a director, they don't need a boss telling them what to do.

So, if you want to build a good Sangha, an ideal Sangha we just observe our body, we just observe the termites, we just observe the bees, we just observe the neurons and we know the best way to do it.

One of the attendants of the senior nuns reported to Thay that one day there were a team of two attendants and one sister is five or six years older than the other. The young attendant just looked at her big sisters and observed her and suddenly she knew what to do and what not to do because maybe there is more than one thing to do at the same time in order to make the senior nuns happy. So just observing, allow yourself to be in the place, to be penetrated by the information and then you naturally know what to do in order to complete the other's actions. And you don't need the other to tell you what to do, you just know what needs to be done at this moment and then the two attendants without any communication act together as a team. No one giving orders to the other, and the situation becomes perfect. No words needed, no order needed, just be there and become one with the whole situation and you know what to do and what not to do for harmony to reign. It is very interesting. There is no thinking needed, no pre-arrangement needed, no preparation needed, you just allow yourself to be there, to be mindful of the situation and then naturally you know what to do and what not to do to make the senior nuns happy and to make you happy also. It is like a piece of music, like a symphony, without a conductor.

The human brain is the most sophisticated thing that we can observe. There are so many neurons in it, billions of them, and yet harmony reigns in the brain. Suppose you are a New Yorker and you live with ten million other New Yorkers and you want to have a connection with all the other New Yorkers. Suppose you provide yourself with ten million strings and you tie one string onto yourself and one string to another New Yorker, and you do like that ten million times in order for you to be connected to all other New Yorkers. And each New Yorker will do the same thing like you. Each New Yorker will have ten million strings in order to be connected with other New Yorkers. Let us suppose that New York is ten times bigger, that is the situation of the brain, one neuron is in communication with all the other neurons. The neurons have impulses in them, they want to express, they want to communicate, they want to do something. And in every individual cell of the brain there is a kind of impulse, they fire electric impulses from themselves and all the other cells of the brain receive them. The neuroscientists have measured that the speed of these electrical impulses fired by each neuron is 400 km an hour and in one fraction of one second they fire again. Communication is permanent and all the other neurons receive the information permanently. In one second there are several times when electrical impulses are fired from one neuron to another or other neurons and that is why communication is always going on.

In a Sangha, if we want the communication to continue we should open ourselves. We should learn the art of communication. We communicate by the way we walk, the way we wish dishes, the way we look at our brother or sister. We can communicate in many ways, we don't have to use chemicals, like the termites, because our thought, our body and our speech they are energies, they are equivalent to chemicals because chemicals they are energy anyway. So every thought we have in our minds can be expressed in our way of looking, in our way of acting, so we communicate always. If the communication does not reach you it is because you are blocked somehow. Your practice is to unblock yourself for the communication of the members of the Sangha to reach you.

The scientists have tried many ways to understand the way the brain would operate. Suppose they play music, they play Beethoven and then they observe how the cells in the brain respond to the rhythm and to the music. Every note. They observe that zones in the brain suddenly light up and on the other side, another area of the brain lights up and there is a continuation of oscillation, back and forth like that. They operate exactly like a symphony and without any conductor. And one moment of music, one note, comes together like this. And you don't see anything, there is nothing organized that you can see. So it becomes very organized, expressing like that and suddenly it is completely unglued, dissolves, you don't see anything and the next moment it comes up like this and total harmony will be seen again.

One of the four conditions we have learned, the previous moment of consciousness has opened the way for the next moment of consciousness and the base is always there in order to hold everything. It is perfectly organized in harmony and suddenly there is nothing,

everything is disorganized and yet the next moment it will be reorganized in a perfect way again, and in the meantime alaya vijnana is holding all the seeds. If the first moment of consciousness has not happened, how could the second moment of consciousness take this? One moment of manifestation, one moment of emanation, today they like the word emanation, they don't use the word manifestation, emanation is the same thing: everything is an emanation of alaya vijnana, store consciousness.

So there must be a base, the root consciousness from which elements will come together in a very, very natural way, without any conductor, any self, expressing like that and then dissolving like that as if there were no organization at all. And again, it comes up, manifested again and scientists see very clearly that there is no self in the brain, no conductor, and they witness to the fact, to the insight of no self in the brain, there is no self. And scientists today say, what we can do to help you, my Buddhists friends, is to put a stamp on the teaching of non-self because science has proven that there is no self. We cannot do more than that, they said.

That is true because so many of them have witnessed to the insight, to the truth of no self. Our scientists, neuroscientists and even psychologists and sociologists they have all discovered the truth of non self. They can write, they can speak, they can testify to the truth of non self but they are still unable to live up to the truth of non self. So after having got out of their lab they go home and continue to live as their self, and they behave with their families and with their friends as if they had not see the truth of non self.

That is happening in the last years of the twentieth century. It is happening right now that scientists have discovered the truth of non self, of interbeing, of the nature of interconnectedness. They can testify to that truth, but they are not able to live that truth yet because they have not found ways in order to implement that insight into their daily life.

Many of us in the Buddhist Institute we do the same: we come to the classroom, we listen to our teacher about non self and interconnectedness. We believe, we have faith, in that teaching and yet when we go back to our brothers and sisters we don't apply very much the insight of non self. We get angry, we still get jealous and so on. We are not capable of behaving like the bees or the termites or the neurons or the cells in the body and our practice is to rely on the Sangha in order to be able to do so. Sangha building relies on us and in order to be a good Sangha builder we should see the truth of non self. We should see the truth of interbeing and we should come together to find ways in order to implement the insight of non self and impermanence in our way of doing things in the Sangha. And that is what we have been trying to do, that makes us different from the scientists.

We are not satisfied with the insight of non self, we want to live the insight of non self, that is why when we organize a retreat, we organize in such a way that everyone of us behaves like a bee. We don't need a director, we don't want to be ordered about. If we don't want to be ordered about, the only alternative is to open ourselves to see what is really going on, so that we would know what to do and what not to do in order for the organization to be perfect. So, when you organize a retreat for your friends, suppose you want to organize a retreat for business people. That is an opportunity for you to come together and learn the way to operate like a community of bees, a community of termites, a community of cells, a community of neurons, because in truth, reality functions like that, on the base of non self, on the base of interbeing.

In our century, the century which is ending, is characterized by individualism. We no longer believe in the family. The family structure has been shut down because we follow the cult of the individual. We want only to do things that make us feel good, only to satisfy our private desire. We don't care about the family, we don't care about the church, we don't care about society, we follow just the order of the self.

They tell us that we have to go Vietnam and fight the Communists. They tell us that according to the domino theory if you cannot stop communism in Vietnam then communism will take over the world. But going to Vietnam and dying in the jungle in Vietnam is not something we feel good about. So we resist the war, we resist going to Vietnam. At

Christmas time, instead of talking in terms of love, going home to our families and people and laughing like Santa Claus, ho, ho, ho. We say, we won't go; ho, ho, ho, we won't go, we won't go to Vietnam, because going to Vietnam and dying - that does not feel good. So the young people come together and resist. They have come together to resist not because they are compassionate, they care about the life of the Vietnamese, but because going to the jungle in Vietnam and dying there does not feel good. Therefore they rally people to resist the war and resist the war not for the sake of compassion but because the war doesn't belong to us. The war is yours, your generation wants this war, we the young people do not want this war because we don't feel good about this war.

So the peace movement was not based on a humanitarian idea, but just resisting the old generation and the ideas of the old generation. The peace movement was based on the cult of the self, that is why it was not a real peace movement. That is what happened during the sixties. If you have gone through that period, please sit down and look back. Resistance to the war was rather an egoistic act and not really a compassionate one. That is why there was so much anger, so much hatred in the peace movement. When I was there calling for stopping the bombing, many people said, "We don't want to stop the bombing, we want America to be defeated", because they were so angry. The defeat of America was their aim, but as a person who represented millions of people who died under the bombs I only wanted to see something very concrete, right away for people to stop the suffering right away, the cessation of the bombing, now, right away. And the peace movement said, no, we don't want a cessation of the bombing, we want only American withdrawal, we want only a defeat of America and they were not able to understand. Because stopping the bombing first and then arranging for other things would be more realistic.

I was working with people trying to stop the war in Vietnam, and I had a lot of contact with people in the peace movement. And the young people in the sixties, many of them operated on the base of self, not on the base of compassion, of understanding.

If it feels good, do it, that was the motto of the young generation. And also in context of the war they would say, make love, not war, remember? Because, make love, it feels good, make war, it doesn't feel good. And that is why our century, at least the second half of our century was characterized by the cult of the self: the small self, the atomized self. We only care about ourselves, care about the fame and the wealth and consumption by the self. Individualism has reached its highest point in the second half of the twentieth century. Now the young people have grown up, they got married, they have jobs and many have important positions in the Government. The scandals they produce which make us suffer also come from that tradition, that habit energy of serving the self.

Let us look deeply into the situation of Mr. Clinton and his family. Clinton was a youngster during the sixties, he also went to the streets manifesting against the war; intelligent, active. Unlike John F. Kennedy, he is operating on another base. John F. Kennedy was still very Catholic. What happened during the reign of Mr. Clinton? The scandal that went on, and on, and on, to the point that we had the desire to vomit, was the result of such a situation. Look on Mr. Clinton, look on the situation of his family, look at his spiritual background. We can discover a lot concerning the situation of the young generation that came out of the second half of the twentieth century.

Now people no longer believe in their church, in their spiritual tradition, people don't have a family that is solid, they don't believe in the family any more. When you don't believe in the family you cannot build a family. You don't have happiness in the family, you feel that happiness is possible only when you seek for fame and power and wealth. The happiness lies in the capacity of consuming. It is very clear and many people in the third world begin to imitate the West. In China, in Vietnam, in other countries, people have abandoned their spiritual tradition. They don't believe in Buddhism any more. They are looking for consumption. They want to buy the most sophisticated audio-video equipment, they want to



consume portable telephones, faxes, color television and so on. And that is the meaning of their lives, to consume, to satisfy private desires. Private desires, in Vietnamese.

This is the situation we are in when the twentieth century is ending, the cult of the self. Individualism that has created a lot of suffering. Drugs, alcohol, aids, destruction of the family structure, no spiritual life, mental illness; all these characterize the second half of our century. We have a few weeks in order to do the work of self examination, the examination of our century.

We are to embark on a new century very soon, in two weeks. We should use our time to practice looking deeply. What our elders have done, how they have lived their lives and how we live our lives now, what we have done. Looking deeply. Every day give yourself one hour, two hours, doing sitting or walking, in order to look back at yourself and at our situation. We want to begin anew, we want a different kind of direction for the twenty first century, we don't want to continue this. Because this would be the continuation of our destruction and the destruction of other species. We want to take another direction.

We don't want to follow the direction of individualism, we don't want to continue in the direction of the cult of the self. We want to live in harmony, in the spirit of non self, in the spirit of interbeing. We don't want to follow the cult of self any more. The Sangha is our direction. Sangha building is the most noble task that we do, and Sangha would be the refuge for all of us in the next century. In order for the Sangha to be built we have to unblock ourselves, in order for information to come to us. Like the bees, they are capable of receiving information from other bees. Like the cells in our bodies, they are capable of knowing what to do and what not to do in order for harmony in the body to reign.

We want to behave like cells in our brain. They are in permanent communication with one another, they don't need a conductor, they don't need a director, they don't need a self. The insight is there and even science has testified to the value of the insight. What remains to do is to come together and try our best to live that insight. And the Buddha has offered so many ways to implement that insight into our daily life for us to suffer less, for us not to make the other person next to us suffer. And that is the very basic task of Sangha building.

The message I sent out on the 4th, called New Century Message, contains some of the things I have just shared with you. I would like each of you to have one copy to use as an instrument for the practice of looking deeply, looking back at ourselves, at our situation, at our century in order to know what direction we must take beginning with the twenty first century.

The Vietnamese version has been sent to Vietnam on the 4th of December. We don't have the text in French yet but Thay Doji will do it soon. I have four sets in English and I think I will give one for each hamlet. This is an instrument for us to practice deep looking and there will be a lot of friends coming for Christmas and for New Year. I think we have to offer each of them one copy. The moment when they arrive we should invite them to read the message and to reflect on it. Everyone should have one hour or two at least every day in order to do the work of looking deeply, and that is the practice of beginning anew. We have to look deeply in order to know what stop. What we should not do any more, what we should not continue any more, in order to open up a new area for us and for our children.

Looking deeply is our job, the only thing that is worthwhile to do while being in Plum Village is to practice looking deeply. On the 31st of December Thay will give a Dharma talk at five o'clock in the afternoon, and the message will be something like the message in this Dharma talk, with more details and with an invitation for us to reflect upon.

Any of you has been a citizen of Woodstock nation? Any of you were in Woodstock?

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## Go as a Sangha

Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on December 19, 1999 in Plum Village, France

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Today is December 19, 1999 and we are in the Upper Hamlet for our Dharma talk. I always think of the year 2000 as a bell of mindfulness, I have been using it as a bell of mindfulness to become aware that time passes very quickly. And we should be there in such a way that can make a future possible for our children and their children, because during the twentieth century we have made a mess and individualism has prevailed. The insight of interbeing, the insight of interconnectedness is so important for us. We have to learn that happiness cannot be possible as an individual matter. So seeking for happiness for your individual self is something impossible, and that is why we have to learn to live as Sangha. Not only humans have to live as a Sangha, but they have to learn to live with other species as a Sangha. We have to accept animals, vegetables and minerals as partners, as members of our Sangha and this way of life, this insight is very clear in the Buddhist teaching. So the most meaningful thing for us to do today, tomorrow and after tomorrow is to prepare ourselves to live as a Sangha.

It means we have to get out of the prison of our self and this is a practice. How to get out of the prison of self. We have been so long in that prison of self, we have suffered so much, we have caused a lot of suffering to other people and other species, and that is why to get out of that kind of prison is our practice.

For many years I have been saying that the next Buddha that will come to us will take the form of a Sangha and not an individual. That is not a fantasy on my part, but the insight I have got through my life, through my experience. The next Buddha may take the form of a Sangha and everyone else will be a cell of the Buddhakaya, the Buddha body, and it is possible for us to prepare ourselves to be that cell in the body of the Buddha.

I always think of the twenty first century as a beautiful hill. It may be a great joy to climb the hill together as a Sangha and with the Sangha we can go very far. No matter how old you are, how young you are, you are climbing with the Sangha. The Buddhist sangha has been here two thousand five hundred years and they will continue. Let us be part of that Sangha. Let us use that Sangha in order to form a larger Sangha.

The 21st century may be a very pleasant century for us. You may enjoy deeply the coming century if you know how to embark upon it with faith, with joy, and with insight. I am convinced that with the insight of interbeing, with the capacity of living as a Sangha, the climb will be very beautiful, very pleasant.

You are now at the foot of the hill and in just eleven days we will begin the climb. And we shall be climbing the hill of the century with our ancestors who are in us and with our children: blood ancestors and spiritual ancestors, blood children and spiritual children, hand in hand we will climb the century hill with joy. The only thing to remember is to do it as a Sangha, not as individuals any more. Climbing like that we need some freedom, some liberation: freedom of the self, liberation of the self, and the joy will be collective joy, it will be nourishing us.

Looking into the individual you see the collective and looking into the collective you see the individual and we know that with that insight we will be free. Happiness will not be possible without the happiness of those around us, including animals, vegetables and minerals. On the last day of the year, on the last day of the century we will be celebrating our togetherness according to a schedule offered to us by the brothers of the Upper Hamlet. We will have in the morning two hours of solitary meditation. In the morning we will gather and receive instructions as to how to practice two hours of solitary meditation.

Each of us can go somewhere and really work on it. With our suffering, our despair we can open up a new door for the future. We are determined to begin anew and we make a commitment with ourselves and with our ancestors and our children that we will do it

differently next year, next century. We will not allow individualism to prevail and to destroy. We will learn how to see the happiness of the Sangha as our own happiness and we will learn how to live as a cell in a body, as a bee in a beehive. Responsible, open, because when we are open we receive the information from other members of the Sangha, and we know what to do and what not to do in order for the Sangha to be happy.

The Sangha's will is the Buddha's will. The Sangha's will is God's will, and that is why we have to be open and to receive information. Sometime they don't use words but the way they think, the way they feel, the way they look, the way they act is very clear, and gives very clear messages. So, if we just keep open and then we receive the information. And we know perfectly what to do and what not to do in order to be a good member of the Sangha.

You know that the bees communicate, they communicate with their dance. The termites also, they use chemicals in order to communicate. Our thoughts, our words and our acts are made of energy that is a kind of chemicals. The way we are in a community is the way we communicate and if you are mindful enough, if you are open enough you receive the communication from the other members of the Sangha.

We know that in our brain the neurons they always fire their electrical impulses in order to keep the communication alive and continuous between themselves, they don't need a boss to tell them what to do. The neurons are capable of being there, open and in permanent communication. That is why they respond to other neurons, they collaborate with other neurons in such a wonderful way! We should learn from them.

When we play music we notice that the music and the rhythm create a kind of reaction in our brain. We know that oscillation patterns take place in various areas of the brain and there is a symphony taking place, a kind of orchestra coming together musically, without any director. If you remember the text, you see that the first moment of consciousness takes place in a fraction of a second ksana (Sanskrit) is the shortest unit of time. It is a moment of consciousness and that moment of consciousness is not the product of one neuron, it is a product of all the neurons together. It is like the flame, one ksana (Sanskrit), and if the second moment of consciousness takes place, it is thanks to the presence of the moment of consciousness that has just died. And the two moments of consciousness succeeding each other have a base, because without that base it cannot happen.

Look at the candle. We see the flame, we see the wax, we see the conditions like the oxygen and the flame cannot be there without a base. Because the base is always there that is why the flame can continue. Looking deeply into the flame you can see the base. The base is alaya vijnana, the root consciousness. But the root consciousness, alaya vijnana is not something that is apart from a moment of consciousness because looking deeply into the moment of consciousness which lasts only a fraction of a second we can see alaya vijnana, we can see the base. It is like looking at the flame we can see everything else, like the wax and so on.

Living in the community we are aware that every one of us has a base, the notion of base in Buddhism is very important. Ashraya (Sanskrit) means the base. Touching ourselves deeply, looking deeply into ourselves we can touch the base. And being able to touch our base we are able to realize the nature of interconnectedness within us and (with) the rest. It means our brothers and sisters, our brother tree, our sister rock, all our brothers and sisters. Looking into a rock we see the base, looking into a tree we see the base, looking into our brother we see the base. It is like looking into every Dharma we can see alaya vijnana, it is the same. And with that insight in us there is no longer any separation if we know how to respond and to react in a way that harmony will be possible in the Sangha, and in the larger Sangha because our Sangha has humans, animals, minerals and vegetables.

So the insight of no self, the insight of interbeing, the insight of interconnectedness if we can keep them alive, if we know how to cultivate that insight and keep it alive daily we will be free from the prison of self. We will be able to see the happiness of the Sangha as our own, this is very important. And that is why in two hours of solitary meditation we should do our best in order to work it out, to make that determination not to continue the ancient way of life. We have to make a solemn promise to us and to our base and to everyone that we will be

different, we will learn to live as a Sangha. The family is a Sangha. The society is a Sangha. The Earth is a Sangha.

Two hours of solitary retreat on the 31st is a gift, whether you are here or you are in another place you are welcome to take at least two hours for your meditation. Look back at yourself, look back at the world and see how much suffering we have created. And we see the roots of the suffering, of isolation, of sorrow, of fear. We see our wrong perceptions, we know that in the past we were victims of our wrong perceptions. We believed so much in our perceptions. And practicing looking deeply we see how wrong we were in our perceptions. And we promise that we will not do like that again, we rely on the Sangha to have a better perception of reality because the Sangha eyes are always brighter, clearer than the eyes of an individual. This is exactly what we say when we declare, I take refuge in the Sangha. I take refuge in the Sangha, means I don't rely on my perceptions alone. I don't want to rely on my individual perceptions alone. I want to be ready to see, to look at things with the Sangha eyes. Using the Sangha eyes is a wonderful practice and that is our practice.

So during the two solitary hours we should take up that kind of resolution. We will promise that we will see with the Sangha eyes, look with the Sangha eyes, and feel with the Sangha heart. That will bring a lot of happiness and harmony into the Sangha, the small Sangha and the larger Sangha. In fact, the five skandhas, the five elements within us are also a Sangha. They find themselves in conflict very often.

So, the two hours of solitary retreat in Plum Village on the 31st is a gift. We will receive some instructions in how to do it and then we will spend two hours alone. Whether we go to the garden, we sit in the meditation hall, work it out and make a promise to yourself. You may like to have it written down in a piece of paper, a promise to yourself, a promise to your ancestors, a promise to your teacher, your promise to your brothers and sisters, your children. That is the most meaningful thing to do on the last day of the century, the last day of the year. When the new century comes, when the New Year comes we will have finished our walking meditation and we'll come to this hall and we offer our prayer and our promises to our ancestors and our children. We have a special prayer for the new century, the New Year. In English, in German, in French and in Vietnamese and each of us will have a copy of that prayer, of that promise but you have your own promise you will make as an outcome of your two hours of solitary retreat. You may like to bring it along and after the collective prayers and promises you may like to read it for yourself, to your ancestors and to your children. The promise is made to our ancestors, to our brothers and sisters and also to our children, whether they are blood children or spiritual children, we have to make that promise. That promise will be made after those two hours of solitary meditation.

At some time we have lunch, a simple lunch, because the two hours of solitary retreat may happen during that time also, before lunch, after lunch, at least two hours. And then in the afternoon you may like to continue until the bell calls you for collective mindful work to prepare for the ceremony. At five o'clock in the afternoon will be the last Dharma talk of the year, last Dharma talk of the last century of the 21st century. And that Dharma talk will be relayed simultaneously to Germany and North America. We have the Dharma talk right here and our brothers and sisters in Germany and in America will have it through the telephone.

The Dharma talk will begin at 5pm and end at about 6:30pm and after that we may prepare ourselves for the practice of Touching the Earth. Touching the Earth is a further practice in order to connect with our ancestors, to connect with the land, to connect with other species and to connect with our children and their children, because our children and their children are already there in us. We have to be responsible to our children and their children. After the Dharma talk we'll take some time before we have dinner, and then instead of Dharma discussion we will do a Touching the Earth. Because I think Touching the Earth will be a deeper practice, Touching the Earth is to connect with our ancestors, with our brothers and sisters in the blood family, in the spiritual family, and also to connect with our children and their children who are already there within us. Touching the Earth we should finish before 10:30pm because at 11pm sharp there will be a bell to gather around the linden tree to receive

instructions as to how to do the walking meditation, because we will be climbing the new century together as a Sangha. This is a very special walking meditation. You really want to walk as a Sangha and not as individuals any more.

Have a seen a centipede? A little creature that has lots of.... Yeah! we walk like that! Thousands of feet! There will be a lot of us on that day! To walk in such a way that you can go as a Sangha. If it does not rain the walk will be very pleasant, if it rains we will walk anyway, we have to be equipped with an umbrella. On our path there will be kerosene lamps so that we can walk with ease. It must be a very deep kind of walking, walking as a Sangha. We have to walk in such a way that individuals will dissolve, for the Sangha to walk.

What is the English word for a centipede? Centipede? And we begin to walk at 11:30 or so, or earlier. We'll start from the linden tree and we really begin. The new century has not come yet at that time but we have half an hour in order to reach the other end of the road. When the New Year comes there will be bells, a little bit from everywhere, also from this meditation hall and you will know that the new century has arrived. We'll pause for one minute, to breathe, to be aware that the new century, the new millennium has arrived. Smile to it, and we begin to climb the new century together, with peace, with joy, as a Sangha. This is a very deep practice and joyful practice also. When you come up to the hill there will be a chariot with candles or lamps, and our children will come together and push the chariot which has the number 2000 on it. We will go directly from there to the meditation hall and our path will be lit with kerosene lamps, the brothers don't trust the electricity very much so they want to equip the path with kerosene lamps, hundreds of them.

So, the walk should be very joyful, silent, but powerful and joyful with the children leading. And when we come to the meditation hall we will arrive before the altar of our ancestors, blood and spiritual ancestors, we will light some incense and offer our prayers. Our prayer is to be connected with our ancestors, Sangha, children, and grandchildren. We should select members of the Sangha who can read the promises/prayers out loud in several languages. And each of us will receive a copy of that promise because we vow to live in such a way that the Sangha's happiness becomes our happiness. That is the only way to dissolve suffering and loneliness and to build a happy life for us and for our children in the next century.

After offering incense and flowers and fresh water to our ancestors and to the earth and to our children, then we practice touching the earth four times and it will be time for hugging meditation. And you may have your promise written on a piece of paper and you may like to come forth to the altar and you read it silently. You don't need to go to the altar in order to read it, you can do it anywhere, in the open air and you just read it to the sky and earth, and the ancestors will hear it. Your brothers and sisters and your children will hear it, and that is how we will live the moments of transition between the old year and the New Year.

Bell

At the beginning of this winter retreat I offered the Sangha a kind of homework, remember? And that is very much in line with these instructions, because the homework is the practice of looking deeply in order to see how we acted and reacted when a difficult situation came. The practice, the homework is to see clearly all these elements of that period in order for us to see another way, a better way, of acting and reacting so suffering will not be created for ourselves and for the people around us.

It is very important because if you have suffered during that period you have an opportunity to learn from that period of suffering, you make the vow not to be caught in these kind of perceptions any more. You make a vow to be more open in order to understand better and to respond better, with non violence, with love, with understanding. Then it is us who has the power to transform a situation. We are no longer victims of the situation.

We have the habit of thinking that our happiness depends so much on the situation around us. We have the habit of thinking that our happiness depends on the other person. We don't know that conditions for our happiness are plenty, more than enough for us to be happy. However, we get caught, we are not able of recognizing theses elements of happiness, they are there

already and we deprive ourselves of that happiness and also we deprive the loved ones of their happiness because we are not capable of being happy.

The capacity to be happy should be the object of our practice and we know the Buddha always repeated it. The present moment presents so many wonders of life, and there are so many positive ingredients, so many positive conditions for our happiness. But because we get caught in one idea we cannot make use of these conditions and to be happy in the here and the now. We always blame the situation, we always blame the other person or persons, so the practice is to liberate ourselves from that kind of habit knowing that happiness depends on us, not on the situation or on the other person.

The other person will have to practice very much in the same way. If we can change the way of looking we will dissolve unhappiness and then happiness will just come naturally. We don't have to change the situation, we don't have to change the other person. We accept the situation as it is, we accept the other person as he/she is, and suddenly we become very happy because we are free. We are not caught in our idea of happiness.

In each hamlet there is a wall gazette with the title Climbing the New Century together. I don't know if the brothers and the sisters have created enough space, it should be very large.

And here, 'Climbing Together The Hill', Thay has written in calligraphy these words in English, in French, and in Vietnamese. So, you are welcome to contribute an article for this gazette, you just come and stick that article on the board. Each person will have a space like this, enough for one sheet of paper. If your article is more than one page, you put the first page on the top and after having read the first page they will read the second page. And you may like to use the computer for your article, you may like to use handwriting. You make like to write a poem, a short story, you may draw something. But everything we do for that magazine, for that gazette is in order to think of climbing together the hill of the 21st century. Climbing the hill as a Sangha and not as individuals anymore.

And you may like to write in German, in English, in French, in Vietnamese and so on. We have ten days to enjoy doing that. You are too busy to do it? Shame! You are too busy? So we wish you all a very joyful Christmas and New Year, there will be a lot of people coming, especially for the New Year, and we should help them. How to help them? By practicing deeply. Practicing deeply because you have had the opportunity to receive the instructions during many weeks. We do it deeply and when they come you share with them the way to practice. It is very important. The Dharma teachers, the apprentice Dharma teachers, everyone has to help so that we will have a wonderful celebration of the New Year, of the New Century together. So it depends on how you help our friends when they come to understand the meaning of the practice.

[Bell]

## Post Scriptum

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Dear Friends,

These dharma talk transcriptions are of teachings given by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in Plum Village or in various retreats around the world. The teachings traverse all areas of concern to practitioners, from dealing with difficult emotions, to realizing the interbeing nature of ourselves and all things, and many more.




This project operates from '**Dana**', generosity, so these talks are available for everyone. You may forward and redistribute them via email, and you may also print them and distribute them to members of your Sangha. The purpose of this is to make Thay's teachings available to as many people who would like to receive them as possible. The only thing we ask is that you please circulate them as they are, please do not distribute or reproduce them in altered form or edit them in any way.

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1	<a href="#">Welcome to the dharmatalks-html E-Mail Group</a>	Plum Village	Mon 5/10/1999
5	<a href="#">Plum Village Transcription Project</a>	Transcription Project	Thu 5/13/1999
7	<a href="#">1996 July 16, Returning to Our True Home</a> 	UH-Office	Wed 12/15/1999
8	<a href="#">1996 July 21 Practices for the Twenty-first Cent</a> 	Transcription Project	Sun 12/19/1999
9	<a href="#">Plum Village Dharma Talks format.</a>	Transcription Project	Sun 12/19/1999
10	<a href="#">New Year Message from Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh</a> 	Transcripts	Sat 1/8/2000
11	<a href="#">1996 July 23 Be Like the Earth</a> 	Transcripts	Sat 1/8/2000
12	<a href="#">1996 July 28 Transcending Injustice</a> 	Transcripts	Sun 1/16/2000
13	<a href="#">1996 July 30 The Art of Healing Ourselves</a> 	Transcripts	Wed 2/2/2000
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15	<a href="#">1996 Aug 6 Mara and the Buddha - Embracing our S</a> 	Transcripts	Sun 3/19/2000
16	<a href="#">1996 Aug 11 Meditations for the Sick and Dying</a> 	Transcripts	Mon 4/3/2000
17	<a href="#">1996 Aug 13 1996 Suffering Can Teach Us</a> 	Transcripts	Mon 4/17/2000
18	<a href="#">1997 Aug 11 - All in one, One in All.</a> 	Transcripts	Tue 5/9/2000
19	<a href="#">1997 Aug 13 Going to the Shore of Non-Suffering</a> 	Transcripts	Tue 5/30/2000
20	<a href="#">1997 July 16 Taking Good Care of Our Habit Energi</a> 	Transcripts	Wed 6/28/2000
21	<a href="#">July 21 1997 We are the Continuation of our Ancest</a> 	Transcripts	Sun 7/23/2000
22	<a href="#">July 23 1997 Watering Our Good Seeds</a> 	Transcripts	Sat 8/5/2000
23	<a href="#">July 28 1997 Overcoming the Fear of Death</a> 	Transcripts	Mon 8/14/2000
24	<a href="#">July 30 1997 Healing is Possible through Resting</a> 	Transcripts	Fri 9/1/2000
25	<a href="#">1999 Nov 25 Recognizing Feelings</a> 	Transcripts	Wed 1/17/2001
26	<a href="#">E-dharma talks of Thich Nhat Hanh!</a> 	Transcripts	Wed 1/17/2001
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28	<a href="#">1999 Dec 05 The means are the end</a> 	Transcripts	Tue 2/27/2001



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2	<a href="#">1999 Dec 09 Questions &amp; Answers</a> 	Transcripts	Fri 3/16/2001
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3	<a href="#">1999 Dec 16 Living in the Spirit of Non-self</a> 	Transcripts	Thu 6/7/2001
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3	<a href="#">1999 Dec 19 Go as a Sangha</a> 	Transcripts	Fri 6/15/2001
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<http://www.mindfulnessdc.org/mlkletter.html>

Martin Luther King, Jr - Letter to the Nobel Institute  
January 25, 1967

The Nobel Institute  
Drammesnsveien 19  
Oslo, NORWAY

Gentlemen:

As the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate of 1964, I now have the pleasure of proposing to you the name of Thich Nhat Hanh for that award in 1967.

I do not personally know of anyone more worthy of the Nobel Peace Prize than this gentle Buddhist monk from Vietnam.

This would be a notably auspicious year for you to bestow your Prize on the Venerable Nhat Hanh. Here is an apostle of peace and non-violence, cruelly separated from his own people while they are oppressed by a vicious war which has grown to threaten the sanity and security of the entire world.

Because no honor is more respected than the Nobel Peace Prize, conferring the Prize on Nhat Hanh would itself be a most generous act of peace. It would remind all nations that men of good will stand ready to lead warring elements out of an abyss of hatred and destruction. It would re-awaken men to the teaching of

beauty and love found in peace. It would help to revive hopes for a new order of justice and harmony.

I know Thich Nhat Hanh, and am privileged to call him my friend. Let me share with you some things I know about him. You will find in this single human being an awesome range of abilities and interests.

He is a holy man, for he is humble and devout. He is a scholar of immense intellectual capacity. The author of ten published volumes, he is also a poet of superb clarity and human compassion. His academic discipline is the Philosophy of Religion, of which he is Professor at Van Hanh, the Buddhist University he helped found in Saigon. He directs the Institute for Social Studies at this University. This amazing man also is editor of Thien My, an influential Buddhist weekly publication. And he is Director of Youth for Social Service, a Vietnamese institution which trains young people for the peaceable rehabilitation of their country.

Thich Nhat Hanh today is virtually homeless and stateless. If he were to return to Vietnam, which he passionately wishes to do, his life would be in great peril. He is the victim of a particularly brutal exile because he proposes to carry his advocacy of peace to his own people. What a tragic commentary this is on the existing situation in Vietnam and those who perpetuate it.

The history of Vietnam is filled with chapters of exploitation by outside powers and corrupted men of

wealth, until even now the Vietnamese are harshly ruled, ill-fed, poorly housed, and burdened by all the hardships and terrors of modern warfare.

Thich Nhat Hanh offers a way out of this nightmare, a solution acceptable to rational leaders. He has traveled the world, counseling statesmen, religious leaders, scholars and writers, and enlisting their support. His ideas for peace, if applied, would build a monument to ecumenism, to world brotherhood, to humanity.

I respectfully recommend to you that you invest his cause with the acknowledged grandeur of the Nobel Peace Prize of 1967. Thich Nhat Hanh would bear this honor with grace and humility.

Sincerely,

Martin Luther King, Jr.

## **Embracing Anger**

Thich Nhat Hanh

My Dear Friends, I would like to tell you how I practice when I get angry. During the war in Vietnam, there was a lot of injustice, and many thousands, including friends and disciples of mine, were killed. I got very angry. I learned that the city of Ben Tre, a city of three hundred thousand people, was bombarded by American aviation just because some guerrillas tried to shoot down American aircrafts. The guerrillas did not succeed, and the city was destroyed. The military man responsible for that later declared that he had to destroy Ben Tre to save it. I was very angry.

But at that time, I was already a practitioner. I did not say anything, nor did I act, because I knew that acting or saying things while angry may create a lot of destruction. I went back to myself, recognizing my anger, embracing it, and looked deeply into the nature of my suffering.

In the Buddhist tradition, we have the practice of mindful breathing, of mindful walking, to generate the energy of mindfulness. With that energy we can recognize, embrace and transform our anger. Mindfulness is the kind of energy that helps us be aware of what is going on inside of and around us. Anybody can be mindful. When you breath in and you know that you are breathing in, and you focus your attention on your in-breath, that is mindfulness of breathing. The basic practice in Zen centres is the practice of generating mindfulness every moment of your daily life. When you are angry, you are aware that you are angry. Because you already have the energy of mindfulness in you, created by the practice, you can recognize, embrace, look deeply, and understand the nature of your suffering.

I was able to understand the nature of the suffering in Vietnam. I saw that not only did Vietnamese suffer but Americans suffered as well during the war. The young American man who was sent to Vietnam in order to kill and be killed underwent a lot of suffering, and the suffering continues today. The family, the nation also suffers. I could see that the cause of our suffering in Vietnam was not American soldiers. It is a kind of policy that is not wise. It is a misunderstanding. It is fear that lies at the foundation of the policy.

Many in Vietnam had burned themselves in order to call for a cessation of the destruction. They did not want to inflict pain on other people, they wanted to take the pain on themselves in order to get the message across. But the sounds of planes and bombs were too loud. So I decided to go to America and call for a cessation of the violence. That was in 1966, and because of that I was prevented from going home. And I have lived in exile ever since.

I was able to see that the real enemy of man was not man. The real enemy is our

ignorance, discrimination, fear, craving, and violence. I did not have hate for the American people or the American nation. I came to America in order to plead for a kind of looking deeply so that the government could revise that kind of policy. I met with Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara and told him the truth about the suffering. I was very grateful for his quality of listening. Three months later, when the war intensified, I heard that he resigned from his post.

Hatred and anger were not in my heart. That is why I was listened to by many young people in my country when advocating them to follow the path of reconciliation. Together we helped to bring about the new organizations for peace in Paris. I hope my friends here in New York are able to practice the same. I understood, I understand suffering and injustice, and I feel that I understand deeply the suffering of New York, of America. I feel I am a New Yorker. I feel I am American.

## **deep listening**

In Buddhism we speak of the practice of deep listening, compassionate listening, a wonderful method by which we can restore communication - communication between partners, between father and son, between mother and daughter, communication between nations to understand the suffering of others.

I always advise a couple that when they are angry with each other, they should go back to their breathing, their mindful walking, embrace their anger, and look deeply into the nature of their anger. And they may be able to transform that anger in just fifteen minutes or a few hours. If they cannot do that, then they will have to tell the other person that they suffer, that they are angry, and that they want the other person to know it. They will try to say it in a calm way. "Darling I suffer, and I want you to know it." And in Plum Village, where I live and practice, we advise our friends not to keep their anger for more than twenty-four hours without telling the other person. And if they are not calm enough to say it, they can write it down.

The second thing they can say or write down is, "I am doing my best." It means, "I am practicing not to say anything, not to do anything with anger, because I know that in doing so I will create more suffering. So I am embracing my anger, I am looking deeply into the nature of my anger." You tell the other person that you are practicing holding your anger, understanding your anger, in order to find out whether that anger has come from your own misunderstanding, wrong perception, your lack of mindfulness and your lack of skilfulness.

And the third thing you might like to say to him or her is, "I need your help." Usually when we get angry with someone, we want to do the opposite. We want to say, "I don't need you. I can survive by myself alone." "I need your help" means "I need your practice, I need your deep looking, I need you to help me to overcome this anger because

I suffer." And if I suffer, then there is no way that you can be happy, because happiness is not an individual matter. So helping the other person to suffer less, to smile, will make you happy also.

Those three things I proposed are the language of true love. It will inspire the other person to practice, to look deeply, and together you will bring about understanding and reconciliation. I propose my friends to write down these sentences on a piece of paper and slip it into their wallets. Every time they get angry they can practice mindful breathing, take it out, and read. It will be a bell of mindfulness telling them what to do and what not to do. These are the three sentences: "I suffer and I want you to know it." "I am doing my best." "Please help." I believe that in an international conflict, the same kind of practice is possible also.

## **practicing peace**

This summer a group of Palestinians came to Plum Village and practiced together with a group of Israelis, a few dozen of them. We sponsored them coming and practicing together. In two weeks, they learned to sit together, walk mindfully together, enjoy silent meals together, and sit quietly in order to listen to each other. The practice was very successful. At the end of the two weeks, they gave us a wonderful report. One lady said, "Thay, this is the first time in my life that I see that peace in the Middle East is possible." Another young person said, "Thay, when I first arrived in Plum Village, I did not believe it was something real because in the situation of my country, you live in constant fear and anger. When your children get onto the bus, you are not sure that they will be coming home. When you go to the market, you are not sure that you will survive to go home to your family. When you go to Plum Village, you see people looking at each other with loving-kindness, talking with others kindly, walking peacefully, and doing everything mindfully. We did not believe that it was possible."

But in the peaceful setting of Plum Village, they were able to be together, to live together, and to listen to each other, and finally understanding came. They promised that when they returned to the Middle East, they would continue to practice. They will organize a day of practice every week at the local level and a day of mindfulness at the national level. And they plan to come to Plum Village as a bigger group to continue the practice.

There are people everywhere in the world that consider vengeance as their deepest desire. They become terrorists. When we have hatred and vengeance as our deepest desire, we will suffer terribly also. Our deepest desire should be to love, to help and not to revenge, not to punish, not to kill. Hatred can never answer hatred: all violence is injustice. Responding to violence with violence can only bring more violence and injustice, more suffering, not only to other people but suffering to ourselves. This is wisdom that is in every one of us. We need to breathe deeply, to get calm in order to



touch the seed of wisdom, which will bring a lot of relief. That is why my suggestion is the practice of being calm, being concentrated and watering the seeds of wisdom and compassion that are already in us. This is a true revolution, the only kind that can help us get out from this difficult situation where violence and hatred prevail.

When I first heard that Ben Tre was destroyed by American bombardiers, I got very angry. As a practitioner, I went back to my breathing and I looked deeply. And compassion in me arose. I wrote this poem:

*I hold my face in my two hands.  
No, I am not crying.  
I hold my face in my two hands  
to keep my loneliness warm-  
two hands, protecting,  
two hands, nourishing  
two hands preventing  
my soul from leaving me  
in anger.*

(Excerpted from a talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh at Riverside Church in New York on September 25th, 2001.)

Below is an excerpt from a transcription of a Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh, explaining the difference between a Dharma Talk and a lecture.

"Listening to a Dharma talk is also a form of practice. We used to be in school, listening to lectures and so on, and during that time we got in the habit of using only our intellect, because what we needed in school was our intellect. But in a practice center a Dharma talk is not just a lecture. A Dharma talk is an opportunity to open ourselves up and to allow the deepest levels of our consciousness to be exposed to the Dharma. Instead of using the intellect, we put the intellect to rest, because our intellect has the tendency to compare, to judge, to evaluate, to arrange things and ideas and classify them into boxes.

The Dharma is not a lecture. The Dharma in the Buddhist tradition is a kind of rain. Our consciousness should behave like the soil, the earth. We have to allow the Dharma talk to penetrate. According to

the Buddha we have seeds of understanding, of  
awakening, of  
compassion, within ourselves. We don't need these seeds  
to be  
transmitted from the teacher. We already have all of  
them in the depth  
of our consciousness. We call it store consciousness,  
sometimes earth  
consciousness. Because these seeds are buried deep in  
the mind, in the  
soil of our consciousness, it is very hard for them to  
grow and  
manifest. Above there are many layers of suffering,  
confusion,  
prejudices and so on, and our intellect can never go  
deep enough. Our  
intellect very often contradicts our deepest nature and  
therefore to  
allow the intellect to rest and to open our earth store  
in order for  
the rain of the Dharma to penetrate is very important.

[Thay recites a poem in Vietnamese and then translates]

The spring rain is falling gently  
and the earth and the soil of my consciousness  
is penetrated by the rain.  
And the seed deep within me  
now has a chance to be penetrated by the rain and to  
smile, sprouting.

We have to listen to the Dharma with that kind of

spirit, to allow the  
soil of our consciousness to be penetrated by the  
Dharma rain, not  
using ideas, concepts, that we already have to compare  
and to  
classify. That is very important. If we are already  
used to that kind  
of listening, using only the intellect to judge, to  
compare, to  
classify, we have to learn a new way, because listening  
to a Dharma  
talk is not the same thing as learning the philosophy  
of Buddhism.  
They are two things, quite different. A lady who left  
us yesterday  
said that during one hour and a half, Thay said very  
much the same  
thing. He could have done it in fifteen minutes. She  
was very hungry  
for ideas, but she did not realize that a Dharma talk  
is a time for  
practice. The teacher is supposed to offer the Dharma  
rain in such a  
way that the good seeds in the people can be penetrated  
and can sprout  
and become flowers, the flower of understanding, the  
flower of  
compassion and so on.

Using our intellect is like using a nylon sheet to  
order to receive  
the rain, or nylon buckets to receive the rain. When

you use a nylon sheet, you prevent the rain from penetrating into the soil. That is why there is a way to listen to Dharma talks. That way is not to use your intellect. You let your whole person be penetrated by the Dharma, and your person includes the body. We know that our consciousness has so many layers and the deepest layers are very difficult to reach and therefore we have to bring our selves to a state of oneness. The body is there and the mind is there, the consciousness is there, and we just allow the rain of the Dharma to fall.

In the time of the Buddha it is reported in many sutras, many people would get enlightened during the Dharma talk and their eyes would get very bright and they were released from the bondage they had carried with them for a long time. When the Buddha saw that person, he always said, "That person got liberated. That person has understood. That person has been transformed." So transformation and healing can be possible also during a Dharma talk."

# Cultivating Mindfulness in the Context of a Sangha

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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Dear Sangha, today is the 30<sup>th</sup> of July, 1998, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We are going to speak English today.

The bell of mindfulness is an important practice in Plum Village. Every time you hear the bell, you shouldn't do anything, you shouldn't think of anything, you shouldn't say anything. You have to go back to your in-breath and out-breath, and listen very deeply. Because the sound of the bell is considered to be the voice of the Buddha calling us back to our true home, that sound is very sacred. The sound may be said to be something outside of you, but if you practice for a few days, you will know that that sound does not really come from the outside, it comes from the inside.

The Buddha is someone who is very close to us. The Buddha is the power of awakening, of loving, of understanding in us. Every time the Buddha is calling, we have to listen with all our being. That is why our minds have to be with our bodies; so we stop every activity, including thinking, and we go back to ourselves, using our breathing as a vehicle. We arrive, and we listen very deeply to the voice of the Buddha. That is the voice of peace, of stability, of freedom. If we don't know how to listen to the voice of the Buddha, we won't be able to restore peace, tranquility, and solidity inside ourselves. In Plum Village we enjoy the practice of listening to the bell very much. Every time I listen to the bell, I feel I am a better person. I am more solid, I am more free. I am calmer, more understanding. That is why everyone should profit from the practice of listening to the bell of mindfulness.

You will notice that in Plum Village we practice mindfulness of listening with other sounds. For, example, every time we hear the telephone ringing, all of us in Plum Village will stop our talking, stop our thinking, and go back to our in-breath and out-breath, and listen. Even though the sound of the telephone is a very ordinary kind of sound, when you practice, it becomes something very important too. We practice breathing, with the gatha: "Listen, listen, this wonderful sound brings me back to my true home." "Listen, listen," that is what you say when you breathe in. When you say, "Listen, listen," that means "I am listening deeply," and when you breathe out you say, "This wonderful sound brings me back to my true home." My true home is where there is peace, there is stability, there is love, and I love to go home, because at home I feel safe.

We have been practicing telephone meditation for, I think, fourteen years now in Plum Village. All of us enjoy the sound of the telephone. The sound of the telephone does not irritate us anymore, because we can consider it to be a bell of mindfulness. The bell master does not need to be here, the bell master can be somewhere in Canada, or Russia; and suddenly we have a bell master ringing the bell for us to breathe in and breathe out, and we feel wonderful. When the first sound is heard, we stop talking, we stop thinking, we enjoy our in-breath and our out-breath, and we smile. When the telephone rings for the second time, we can still afford to breathe, to smile, to enjoy ourselves. We don't worry, because if the other person has something really important to tell us, she will not hang up after the second ring. Therefore we can still enjoy breathing and smiling with the second sound of the bell. When the third sound is heard, you can stand up, and you can walk in the direction of the telephone, but you do it calmly, breathing and smiling while walking, and you practice walking meditation with a lot of dignity. You don't run like a rabbit, because you have quieted yourself. You make each step like the steps made by a lion, very firm, very stable, and you are breathing in, calming, and breathing out, smiling. So you are still in a state of concentration. That is the joy of meditation, nourishing you with the element of stability and peace. When you pick up the phone and say, "Hello, this is Plum Village, may I help you?" your voice

sounds fine. It sounds peaceful and loving. At the other end of the line, people will be glad to listen to your voice. If your voice is nervous, if your voice is troubled, that would not help very much.

Everyone in Plum Village has to learn how to be in charge of the telephone. You may be in charge of taking care of the telephone one day, and during that day, you practice telephone meditation very, very well. You practice breathing in and out when you hear the telephone ringing, and you practice using loving speech. Your voice should be calm, solid, and loving. You will have an opportunity to practice all of these things, and the next day it will be someone else's turn to practice taking care of the telephone.

If you are the one who is calling, you can also practice telephone meditation. There is a beautiful poem that we use before we make a phone call. In Plum Village, we always do it that way; we never pick a telephone up before we practice mindful breathing and mindful smiling. The poem goes like this: "Words can travel hundreds and thousands of kilometers, and they are supposed to build up more understanding and communication. I am determined that my words will be like jewels. I am determined that what I say will be like flowers." You make the vow to practice loving speech. The poem has four lines; the first line is for your in-breath, the second line is for your out-breath. Therefore, if you practice with the poem you have a chance to practice breathing in and out twice, while you use your right hand, or your left if you want, to touch the telephone. While breathing you calm yourself, and you smile. And after you have practiced breathing in and out like that twice with the gatha, you are fresh, you are calm, you are qualified to make a phone call. That is not only good for you, but good for the other person who will receive the phone call. After having practiced breathing and smiling two times, you begin to dial the number, and after having dialed, you hear the sound of the telephone ringing in the other house. What does it mean? It means that you have another chance to practice breathing in and breathing out.

The other person is still sitting there calmly, listening to the telephone ringing and breathing in and out. She will not come and pick up the telephone just after the first sound, because she is practicing telephone meditation also. So you know that she is still practicing, and you tell yourself, "She is breathing and smiling, why not me?" So you don't wait, you just enjoy your breathing and smiling with the sound of the bell that you hear in the telephone. You know that you have to breathe with at least three sounds of the telephone before the other person will pick up the telephone. If you add it up, you will see that making a telephone call like that, you have at least five sounds with which to practice mindful breathing. Do you know how many mindful breathings you can make with five sounds? With every sound like that you can breathe for one or two or three times, in-breath and out-breath.

Every time we start a Dharma discussion or a Dharma talk, we always invite the bell to sound three times, and after one sound of the bell we breathe in and out three times. This means we breathe in nine times, and we breathe out nine times, and that is enough to bring calm and stability into us. While eating we also practice breathing in and out with three sounds of the bell. So the sound of the bell in Plum Village is quite important, and we also make use of the sound of the telephone. When the other person picks up the telephone, you have already breathed in and out a lot, and smiled a lot, and you are now much better than before you started using the telephone. That is very good for the other person. Talking to each other like that, you see that the quality of your conversation is much better, because you have vowed to say only nice things. You don't reproach, you don't punish the other person, and you don't blame him or her, because you know that blaming or reproaching never helps. So you use only loving speech in order to help the other person to understand you. Communication is a very important practice. Imagine if everyone living in your city practices telephone meditation. There would be much more peace and understanding and joy in your city. People would not be as nervous as they are, people would not be unkind to you, because everyone would know how to practice breathing in and out mindfully, calming and smiling. Everyone would know how to use words that are beautiful like flowers, like jewels, and therefore the quality of life in your city would be very much improved. Therefore, if you enjoy telephone meditation, you should try to help other people to learn and to enjoy telephone meditation also.

The first year we started telephone meditation practice here, we had some problems. We did not have enough experience. When the telephone rang, all of us enjoyed breathing in and out and smiling and calming, and no one wanted to go and answer the telephone. So we had to appoint one person to take care of the telephone, and she had the right to enjoy breathing in and out only three times. But not every one of us likes to sit close to the telephone. We prefer to be working in the vegetable garden, or cleaning the meditation hall, even if we are in charge of the telephone, and every time we hear the telephone ringing, we have to stop and enjoy the breathing. If you were watering the vegetables, then you would have to stop and turn off the hose, and you would practice mindful breathing in and out. Only after the second sound, and the practice, would you begin to start to walk into the office. It takes time to go from the vegetable garden to the office, so the other person may have had to practice breathing in and out for ten sounds. That happened during the first three or four

years in Plum Village—our friends had to wait for a long time. Therefore, they had an opportunity to practice breathing in, calming, and breathing out, smiling

We not only practice with the telephone, but we also practice with the clock. Every time, every quarter of the hour, when the clock starts playing the music, everyone stops. In every dining hall here in Plum Village there is a clock, and when the clock starts to play music, everyone stops eating, and just listens to the clock very deeply, just as they listen to the bell or the voice of the Buddha. So they enjoy it very much. If it happens that their mind is not there, with the Sangha and with the food, then they have a chance to go back and enjoy the food, and enjoy the Sangha. So the clock is also helping us to go back to ourselves and practice mindful breathing. There are those of us who wear a watch, and from time to time it goes, "beep, beep," and every time we hear that sound we go back to our mindful breathing. It's very helpful.

Fifteen years ago I was in Montreal, and a friend of mine was driving me to the mountains for a mindfulness retreat. During the drive I noticed that on the back of every car there was the statement *Je me souviens*. That was in the province of Quebec. *Je me souviens* means "I remember." I turned to my friend, and I said, "I have a gift for all of my friends who live in Quebec. While you drive your car, if you happen to see the sentence *Je me souviens*, you have an opportunity to go back to yourself and practice mindful breathing and smiling."

Driving your car you may get lost—not in the city, but in your thinking. You might not be able to live deeply in the present moment. While driving your car you might wish to arrive as quickly as possible, and you continue to think of this or that, getting lost in your thought and your worries. But every time you see the words, *Je me souviens*, it means "I remember to breathe and to smile" and *je me souviens* becomes a bell of mindfulness. So at the retreat I said, "I have a gift to make to all of you. *Je me souviens* is a bell of mindfulness. Every time you drive and you see *je me souviens*, you have to go back to yourself, enjoy the present moment, enjoy breathing in and breathing out. The practice of mindfulness is the practice of being present in the here and the now. You make yourself fully present in the here and the now. You become completely alive in the here and the now. That is the basic practice. In order to be truly present, in order to be really alive, mindful breathing is a very wonderful instrument. Every time you go back to your mindful breathing, you become fully present, you become fully alive, and you can touch life deeply in the present moment. That is why many, many friends of mine in Canada have been practicing *je me souviens* while they drive.

I know that summer vacation is a season when people drive a lot, when there are a lot of accidents and traffic jams. It may not be at all pleasant to drive, but if you know how to practice *je me souviens*, "I am breathing in, breathing out," then the moment becomes pleasant and you will not get nervous because of the traffic jams. When you come to a red light, you might wish that the red light would change as quickly as possible, so that you can continue to drive. You are very eager to arrive, and I don't understand why. It seems that you think that only at the point of arrival will there be peace and happiness, and I am not very sure about that. Sometimes when we arrive, the situation is worse (laughter). The practice of Buddhist meditation is to make the present moment alive and pleasant. You have to make it pleasant and alive and happy right now. That is why I would like to offer to you the red light as a bell of mindfulness. Every time you see the red light, you smile to it. It is a bell of mindfulness; it is a bodhisattva helping you to stop. The red light means "stop!"—stop your running, stop your anguish, stop your belief that happiness can only be possible at the end of the road, that is a superstition and is not true. Whether there is happiness or not depends on the present moment. So when you see the red light, look at it and smile, look at it as a friend, as a bodhisattva, as a bell master. Smile, sit back, and enjoy your breathing. "Breathing in, I enjoy the present moment. Breathing out, I smile." You try to live that moment with peace and freedom. You don't allow yourself to be caught in all kinds of afflictions, irritations and bad humor. We are prey for all these afflictions, and if you go back to yourself and use your mindful breathing and smiling, then you are a better self.

The children are wonderful. They remember what I have taught. I remember once that I gave a retreat for parents and children in southern California, and I talked about the bell of mindfulness, and also about the traffic light. It was reported to me that after the retreat one family drove home very excited about the dharma talk and the retreat, and they talked and talked and talked. Even when they arrived at the red lights they continued to talk. The only person in the car who remembered the teaching was a little girl, seven years old. She said, "Daddy, breathe in and out—the red light is there." The parents were ashamed, because they had forgotten all the teaching. They got excited about the teaching, but they did not practice. So if you are young, don't think that you cannot help. You can help. Every time you come to a red light, practice mindful breathing and mindful smiling, and if your daddy forgets to do that, you can say, "Daddy, breathe, smile, relax," and then life in the automobile will be much more pleasant.

I know that in our time many of us spend a lot of our lives in automobiles, and meditation practice can be done not only in the meditation hall, but according to the practice in Plum Village, meditation can be done in the kitchen, in the garden, in the office, in the car, everywhere. While in Plum Village we have to learn how to do it, because we cannot put aside a



lot of time for sitting meditation. We have to be able to practice meditation wherever we are, and whenever we find it possible. This morning I visited the kitchen of the Upper Hamlet and I observed the gentlemen and the ladies who were chopping vegetables. I did not say "Hello, how are you?" to them, but I was fully aware that they were there, standing and cutting the carrots and the potatoes, preparing the lettuce in mindfulness. The time when you work in the kitchen is also the time for meditation. In Plum Village we have the habit that before a cooking team starts to work, they come and light a stick of incense and practice mindful breathing and offer the incense before they start cooking, because cooking is as holy as sitting meditation. In the morning, if you prepare breakfast, you can transform breakfast preparation into a meditation practice. Follow your breathing in and out, calming, smiling, and become aware of every movement you make. Calm and peace and joy can be obtained in the house, and your children can learn from you.

I used to visit the kitchen, and if I saw a monk or a nun doing something like cutting carrots, I would approach and just stand there, and practice breathing in and out. With my presence there, breathing in and out, I knew that the monk or the nun would be mindful also. So I brought my mindfulness to support the person who was working, and sometimes I would ask, "Dear one, what are you doing?" Most of the time I received an interesting answer, such as "Thay, I am enjoying breathing." That is a very good answer. Sometimes the answer was just silence, and he would look at me and smile. We understood each other very well. And if he said, "Thay, I am cutting carrots," that was the worst answer." Because I was there, and I actually saw him cutting the carrots, so I would have been blind not to see him cutting carrots. So if he answered like that, he had not got anything. So my question, "What are you doing, dear?" meant "Are you doing that with mindfulness my dear? Do you enjoy it?" That was the meaning of my question. That is the language of mindfulness, the language of Zen. So if you answered: "I am cutting carrots," that was a very bad answer. Any kind of answer, but not that one!

In the family, if we want to have more peace, more communication, more happiness, every one has to participate in the practice of mindfulness. First of all, mindfulness of breathing, every time we hear the sound of the bell, every time we hear the sound of the telephone. It would be very helpful if everyone in the family signed a treaty, that every time the telephone rings, everyone in the family would stay still and enjoy breathing in and breathing out, for at least two rings of the telephone...even the very small ones. If you practice telephone meditation like that for one week, you will see the difference. There will be more peace, more harmony, and more unity, in the house. That is why I think the young people can persuade their parents to sign a contract for practicing telephone meditation. You think you can do that? After having practiced telephone meditation for a week or two, will you write me a letter and tell me how you are doing with it? Now a lot of my friends are practicing telephone meditation—even businessmen. You know that businessmen are very busy. Now many of them know how to go from one building to another with walking meditation, walking mindfully, and breathing mindfully. And every time they make a telephone call they always practice mindful breathing in and breathing out. They very often make a series of phone calls, not just one, maybe five or six or seven telephone calls in a row. They have learned how to breathe in and out three times before each phone call. And I am very proud of them. They can bring the mindfulness practice into the busy life of a businessman.

So, the topic for your Dharma discussion today, for the young people, is whether it is possible to start telephone meditation at home. Of course, if you have a bell in your home, and practice the bell of mindfulness every morning, and every evening before you go to sleep, that would be wonderful. When you hear the small bell, please stand up and bow to the Sangha before you go out and start Dharma discussion or whatever you would like to do today.

(Bell)

Bow when you hear the bell. You turn around to the Sangha; you bow again when you hear the bell.

(Bell)

And you go to your right, walking peacefully.

...The children understand what I tell them.

(Bell)

Someone has asked the question: *if someone has a mental illness, should that person go to a therapist first, or can that person start the practice of meditation?* I have heard a meditation teacher say "you have to go to a therapist first, and then you can come back to me." Still there are people who ask the question: *if you have a problem with mental illness, should you go to a therapist first, or can you already profit from the practice of Buddhist meditation?* I read somewhere that a

lay teacher said that you can start by asking the person to sit down on the cushion for some time, one hour or half an hour, to see what happens; then you will know what to do.

I think the answer is that it depends on the type of meditation practice. There are those of us who have so much pain and suffering inside that they cannot afford to be still, to go back to themselves. Every time they sit still, and they begin to pay attention to themselves, they will have to touch the blocks of pain and suffering in themselves. They will be overwhelmed by the energy of suffering in themselves, and that is why they say, "Meditation is not for me. I cannot afford to sit down. It's too calm, and it is the ground for all the suffering in me to manifest." It is true that there are people who have no power to face their own suffering, and who are very much afraid of going home to themselves, because when they go home they will be in touch with the suffering in themselves. There are also those who are afraid of going to sleep, because these pains and sufferings can manifest themselves in dreams. What to do in these circumstances?

The answer within the Buddhist context is that you have to practice taking refuge in the Dharma, and in the Sangha. "Dharma" and "Sangha" here are very concrete things, not just ideas. First of all, taking refuge in the Sangha: the Sangha is a community of brothers and sisters who are practicing. In the Sangha there is the element of stability, the element of joy. The Sangha is a protection, and the Sangha always has a place to be, like a practice center. You go to a practice center and you meet the Sangha. The practice center is a space where everything is created in such a way that you can touch the elements that are refreshing, nourishing and healing. Everything you touch is refreshing, healing and nourishing. The Sangha that is in that place should play the same kind of role, supporting you, protecting you, and nourishing you.

As a member of the Sangha, you know how to walk. You walk mindfully, and with every step you generate the energy of solidity, freedom, peace and calm. You don't run, as on the outside. Every step helps us to go back to the present moment. Every step helps us to touch life more deeply. Every step helps us to touch the wonders of life that are available in the here and the now. Each member of the Sangha should be able to walk like that. In the world, people don't walk like that...not many of them. They are used to running, and they run in order to arrive somewhere, but in a practice center you should arrive at every moment, and every step brings you back to the here and the now, which is your destination. So when you meet the Sangha, you might identify elements of the Sangha who are authentic. Members of the Sangha know how to sit peacefully, wherever they sit: on the grass, on a bench, on the cushions, they always make their bodies and their minds dwell peacefully in the present moment. Sitting means to stop, and not to run anymore. You make yourself available to life, so that life in her turn will make herself available to you. If you are not there, then life will not be there either. Therefore, sitting or walking, you make yourself available, in the here and the now, and life will make herself available to you in the here and the now, also.

The Buddha said that the past is already gone, the future is not yet here; there is only one moment for you to live: that is the present moment. But most of us are not capable of living in the present moment. We are always thinking of the past or the future, because we have anguish, fear, regrets, and anxieties within us. The capacity to be in the here and the now is to be cultivated by the practice. Members of the Sangha should be able to practice that every day, so that when they walk, or they sit, or they do things, they radiate the energy of life, of peace, of stability. The amount of energy, of peace and stability that they emit depends on the level of their practice. Every time you go to a practice center, you profit from that energy. When you see a brother walking like that, you are reminded that you are still running, and you should begin to walk like that too, in order for life to be possible.

Taking refuge in the Sangha is a very important practice. *Sangham saranam gacchami*—I take refuge in the Sangha—is not a declaration of faith; it is a matter of practice. Abandoned, alone, you get lost you get carried away. That is why you come to a practice center, in order to take refuge in the Sangha. You allow the Sangha to embrace you. You allow the Sangha to transport you like a boat, so that you can cross the ocean of sorrow. If you have a Sangha to belong to, if you have a Sangha to embrace you and guide you in your practice, you are a happy person. So taking refuge in the Sangha is a very deep practice, especially for those of us who feel vulnerable, shaky, agitated, and unstable. *I take refuge in the Sangha* is a very urgent practice. Wherever you are, you have to find a Sangha to belong to. And if your Sangha does not have that quality that you expect, then you should make use of your energy and your time to help build the Sangha, and improve the quality of the Sangha.

The place should be appropriate for the Sangha to be. The Sangha builder is like an architect. She knows how to create a space where peace can be. The trees, the water, the air, nature, should help a lot. Elements of the Sangha should include nature. A beautiful path for walking meditation is very important for the Sangha; it is an element of the Sangha. The air you breathe is very important, the trees surrounding you are very important. The water you see running, and singing, that is an important part of the Sangha. And in that space where nature is available to you, elements of the practicing Sangha

are also available to you. This is what we very much need in our time. If you are an architect of the twenty-first century, you have to think of this—an island where we can take refuge, so that we will not be destroyed by the negative elements of life that exist everywhere. The Sangha builder knows how to create a space, and she knows how to convene members of a Sangha, who can live in harmony with each other, who can enjoy the practice, and who can serve as a supporting body for those who come to them. All of us need the Sangha. Creating Sangha is a very important task for all of us. If you enjoy the practice, if you are getting the transformation and healing that you need, then please think of building a Sangha for those you love, and for others who need a Sangha so much. Not only do children need a good environment and a good Sangha, but as adults we all need a Sangha for our protection and for our healing.

The Buddha was a wonderful Sangha builder, and he had many disciples who were excellent Sangha builders also. He knew that without a Sangha, without an environment, the transformation and healing of the people would be very difficult. That is why, if you are a therapist, if you are an educator, please think of it. Healing cannot take place without a place like that, or a body of people like that. You may help to relieve the suffering of someone, but if you put him or her back into his or her environment, then he or she will get sick again, in a few weeks, or in a few months. So after having helped him or her to heal, you should direct him or her to an environment where she can continue her healing and transformation and she can become an instrument to help others. Our society is sick, many of us are sick, because the environment in which we grow up is not appropriate for our growth, for our peace, for our transformation. That is about Sangha. You need the first element, Sangha.

The second element is the Dharma. You have to take refuge in the Dharma, because the Dharma can protect you, the Dharma not as a Dharma talk, or a book, or a discourse, but the Dharma as the practice, embodied by people like yourselves. When you practice mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindful listening to the bell, you bring into yourselves the element of peace, of stability, and you are protected during that time, and you begin to radiate the energy of stability and peace around you. That will protect your children, that will protect your beloved ones, and although you may not give a Dharma talk with your words, you are giving a Dharma talk with your body, with your in-breath, with your out-breath, with your life, and that is the living Dharma. The living Dharma is what we need. We need it very much, as we need the living Sangha. Inside the living Sangha there is the living Dharma.

There is a kind of energy that all of us have to be equipped with, and that is the energy of mindfulness. When we wear that energy, when we are inhabited by that energy of mindfulness, we are ready to go back to ourselves, and we are no longer afraid of the blocks of fear and anguish and suffering in ourselves. But if you don't have that energy as your strength, your protection, when going back to yourself you may be overwhelmed, even crushed by the blocks of pain and sorrow and despair inside you. The question of whether you have to go to a therapist first, before starting Buddhist meditation, could be answered like that. If you were equipped with the Sangha and the Dharma, then you would not need a therapist: you can go home to yourself, embracing the blocks of pain and sorrow and despair in yourself, in order to look deeply into their nature, and begin to transform them, without being a victim of these blocks of suffering. But if you try to go home to yourself without anything to protect you, you might get into trouble. Even if the therapist knows something about you, he or she would not be able to help you, because you are without protection. The therapist cannot be there with you twenty-four hours a day, and during the night or in the early morning, you might be exposed to the pain and the sorrow within you. Therefore, you have to learn the way to protect yourself from your own suffering. And your own sufferings are also yourself.

The principle of the practice in Buddhist meditation is to cultivate the energy of mindfulness. Mindfulness is the energy of the Buddha, and you can cultivate it. One day of practice can help you to strengthen the energy of mindfulness in you, and a week of practice can help to make that energy much stronger. When you are equipped with that energy, you will have no problem in going back to yourself, and looking deeply into the nature of your pain. The Buddha said, don't be too afraid, don't try to run away from your pain, your suffering. The only way for you to get out is to hold your pain, and look deeply into it.

When you have seen the true nature of your pain, you will see also at the same time the way out of it. That is the essence of the first Dharma talk that the Buddha gave to the five monks. That Dharma talk is about the Four Noble Truths, the first being ill being: there is ill being, there is suffering, there is pain. That is the First Truth. It is called a Holy Truth, because without it you cannot see the second truth, the third truth and the fourth one. If you try to run away from your suffering you cannot understand it, and without understanding its nature, you cannot see the way out of it. That is why suffering is a Holy Truth. But you cannot hold that suffering just like that you are still weak. That is why you need the Sangha, you need the Dharma, in order to generate that energy of mindfulness with which you can go back to yourself and hold the suffering in your arms, like a mother holding her baby in her two loving arms. Our pain and suffering is our baby, our baby that needs our attention, our care, and our tenderness. The Buddha advises us to go home and take care of

that ailing baby; you have to have two arms, strong arms, loving arms, in order to pick up the baby and hold it. Those two strong arms, two loving arms, are made of the energy of mindfulness.

Mindfulness is the energy of the Buddha; what makes a Buddha a Buddha is that energy. It is like the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was what inhabited Jesus Christ—he would not have been Jesus if the Holy Spirit had not been in him. But that is not something abstract. You have mindfulness, but you don't have it enough. You are capable of being mindful, but you get lost most of the time. When you pick up the tea, you can pick it up in mindfulness, or without mindfulness. When you drink the tea, you may choose to drink it mindfully, or not mindfully. In our daily lives we usually drink our tea without mindfulness. In our daily lives we breathe in without mindfulness. In our daily lives we sit down without mindfulness. Our practice here is that we try to be mindful of everything that we do, of everything that happens in the present moment. Mindfulness is the capacity of being aware of what is going on in the here and the now. When you drink your tea mindfully, that is the practice of mindfulness of drinking. When you breathe mindfully, that is mindfulness of breathing. When you walk mindfully, that is mindfulness of walking. And when you eat mindfully, that is mindfulness of eating. You have plenty of chances to practice mindfulness.

If you go to a mindfulness retreat for seven days, these seven days are only for the practice of mindfulness. You learn how to do everything mindfully, and surrounding you are brothers and sisters who are trying to do exactly the same. Therefore the practice becomes easy. At home you are alone; you are not surrounded by people who practice mindfulness. But here, when you come, you are aware that everyone is trying to walk mindfully. Every step should bring them back to the here and the now, every step should help a little in the cultivation of stability and peace. So you are reminded by the presence of the sister in front of you, the brother on your left, the brother on your right, and behind you someone is walking mindfully also. You are embraced by the Sangha, and you should let the Sangha embrace you. Suddenly, the practice of mindful walking, mindful sitting, and mindful listening becomes possible. One week of practice like that will help to strengthen the power of mindfulness within you. Every one of us has a seed of mindfulness in us. We are capable of being mindful. The only thing is that we are not mindful all the time. The Buddha is someone who is mindful during the whole day. We can be a Buddha from time to time—we are part-time Buddhas. (Laughter.) With a Sangha we should each be a better Buddha every day.

Mindfulness cannot be mindfulness of nothing. When you breathe mindfully, that is mindfulness of breathing. When you walk mindfully, that is mindfulness of walking. The energy of mindfulness can help us to touch the positive elements of life, and also the negative elements of life. For beginners, it is very important to cultivate mindfulness in order to touch the positive aspects of life. Of course, there are negative things in us and around us, but with the support of a Sangha, we should be able to touch the more positive aspects first. Because in the beginning we are not strong enough to go and touch the negative things in us.

If you are a therapist, and you want to apply this principle to your practice, when your client comes you inquire about the things that have not gone wrong yet. The tendency is to ask what is wrong. Your patient or your client is there to tell you what is wrong with him or with her, so both of you are inclined to talk about what is wrong. But according to this practice of mindfulness, you can do differently. You can inquire about the things that have not gone wrong yet: what is not wrong? You talk about it, you become aware of that, and by touching the positive aspects that are in her and around her, you help her to get the nourishment that she needs. She needs a little bit of joy, stability and peace. You help her to restore the balance. Otherwise the painful aspect is too heavy. I think this is possible. Inviting your client to go for walking meditation is possible...and sharing a tea meditation, where people share their joys, their successes in the practice, their capacity of being peace, of reconciliation, and so on.

You as a therapist also need a healthy Sangha. You will not be the best therapist if you don't have one. And when you introduce your client into that Sangha, your client will feel better right away, in the very beginning. You have to create a space, a Sangha. A therapist without a Sangha to me seems like a musician without an instrument. A teacher also, without a Sangha, cannot do much. The Buddha was very aware of that. He spent a lot of time on Sangha building. He had a lot of difficulties in his efforts to build a Sangha, but he succeeded. His Sangha had enough strength, stability and peace.

The Buddha had a friend who was a king, who was born in the same year as the Buddha—the king of Kosala. His name was Pasenadi. When the Buddha first came to teach in his kingdom, he did not like the Buddha. The Buddha was still very young, and many people called him the enlightened one, and he did not like that. He preferred older teachers. But finally he came to a talk by the Buddha, and he was convinced by the virtue, by the peace, by the compassion of the Buddha, and he became his disciple. At the age of eighty, they met for the last time before the king died. During that time of meeting the Buddha, the king said something like this: "Lord Buddha, every time I look at your Sangha I have more confidence in the Lord." He had direct access to the Buddha—he visited Sravasti, the Jeta Grove where the Buddha lived

with his monks, any time that he wished, and he appreciated the Buddha very much. Yet, he made that statement. Every time he looked at elements of the Sangha that moved in dignity, stability and freedom, he had more confidence in the Buddha. So the Sangha helped the Buddha a lot in helping people. That is why I said that a good teacher would need a Sangha. Without a Sangha a teacher cannot do much. You, as a therapist, need the same. In the Sangha you have an instrument to prove that healing is possible, transformation is possible, joy is possible. With that Sangha, you can be much more successful in your attempts to help people. The same thing is true with educators, physicians and artists.

Sangha building is not a matter for Buddhist practitioners alone. Everyone has to learn something about Sangha building, because a Sangha is a very important element for us to help people. Dharma, in this case mindfulness practice...the practice is conducted in such a way that the energy of mindfulness is generated every moment of your daily life. Walking, sitting, breathing, carrot cutting, breakfast making, everything should be done in mindfulness, to help the grain of mindfulness in you to grow, so that every time you need it, you need only to touch the seed of mindfulness in you, and there you are, embraced by the energy of mindfulness. With that energy of mindfulness, you can touch all the beauties and wonders of life in the here and the now, for your own nourishment, and with that mindfulness energy you can embrace the pain, the sorrow, the anguish, and begin to transform them. Without that you cannot do much. So Sangha and Dharma are what you need. Sangha is the practice center with its members, and Dharma is your daily practice of mindfulness, supported by the Sangha.

In the beginning of the practice, with the support of the Sangha, you will be able to restore balance, in order to be able to touch what is beautiful, refreshing and healing around you, and even in yourself. Even if you think that everything inside goes wrong, that is not true—just a few things have gone wrong. There are still many things inside that have not gone wrong yet. The Sangha will help you to go home to yourself and touch these wonderful things. And the same thing is true with what's around you. It's like a garden—your body, and your consciousness and your environment are like a garden. Maybe there are a few trees and bushes that are dying. You might have let that kind of sight overwhelm you, creating a lot of anguish and suffering. You are not aware that there are still many trees that are solid, vigorous and beautiful. When we come into your garden, we can help to point out to you that you still have a lot of beautiful trees, so why do you cry like that? You have to enjoy the things that have not gone wrong yet within your landscape. And that is the role that the Sangha can play. The therapist has to do the same: identify what is not wrong, and help the client to touch and to embrace those things.

Before a surgery, the doctor will look at your body to see if your body has enough strength to endure the surgery, and if you are still weak, then he or she will help to bring a little more strength into your physical body, so that you can tolerate the time in surgery. It is the same here. If the sorrow, the fear, the pain, is a little bit too much, then you should not go directly to it, trying to solve it as soon as possible. You should do the other thing first: you should lean on the power of the Sangha in order to enjoy the steps you make, and what you see, to enjoy the wonderful refreshing and healing things which are around you. The sky is still blue, the trees are still beautiful, the face of your little boy is still wonderful, and you are not capable of touching these. To you everything is still dark, negative. You have lost your capacity to smile, and you feel that left alone you cannot make it. But if you have a friend you trust, a friend capable of smiling of enjoying a cup of tea, and if you go to him or to her, you will feel her energy support you, and walking with her in the garden, you will be capable of seeing that the dandelion is beautiful. Intellectually, you know that the flower is beautiful, but practically, you have no power to touch that beauty, because something is standing between you and that flower. You know that there are beautiful things, but you just cannot touch them. You think that you are going to die, to break down. Since your friend has come, walking beside you, sitting close to you, you feel the capacity of enjoying a cup of tea again. You feel that you can touch the beauty of the flower again. That is the spiritual strength, the positive elements in the other person that can support you.

When you come to a Sangha, you have to know how to profit from the energy of the other people in the Sangha. Many of them are capable of enjoying a beautiful sunset. Many of them are capable of enjoying a cup of tea and dwelling firmly in the present moment, and not allowing worries or regrets to infiltrate and spoil everything. Sitting close to these people, walking close to these people, you profit from their energy and suddenly you have restored your balance. You can do that, so don't use your time to speak about negative things. Make good use of your time, and practice touching the positive aspects of life in you and around you. The time will come when you have to be on your own, and without that energy of mindfulness, you cannot be on your own. Therefore, the time being with the Sangha is very precious. Allow yourself to use the time just to practice, to restore balance.

(Thay begins drawing on white-board.) Suppose there is a house, with a big basement, and a living room. Our consciousness is like that: we have a big storehouse, and a living room. In Buddhist psychology, we call the living room "mind consciousness." We call this lower part "store consciousness," because the basement is used to store many things.

All our suffering, our fear, our despair, we want to throw all of them down there, lock the door, and not allow them to come up. We are afraid of going home to sit in the living room, especially when the living room is empty, because then the blocks of pain, of fear will always try to push the door open and go upstairs. These blocks of pain are there, within the depth of your consciousness. In the past we have lived in forgetfulness, we did not care about what was happening, and we have allowed these blocks of pain and suffering to be formed. We didn't know how to prevent them from being formed—we call them "internal formations." The Sanskrit term is *samyojana*, blocks of pain, of sorrow, of fear, of anger, of attachment.

We are afraid of going home to ourselves because we know that if we do, we will have to face these blocks of pain when they manifest themselves. That is why our practice is to keep the living room always occupied. Most of us follow that policy: every time we feel that it is empty, we invite someone to sit there in order to occupy the room. That is the easiest way to prevent these things coming up. We complain that we don't have the time for ourselves, but when we have one hour, three hours, we don't know what to do with this time. We feel threatened, because if we sit alone in the living room, these monsters will try to come up, and therefore most of us will do something like picking up a magazine to read, or turning on our television sets to watch, or picking up the telephone to talk with someone. We cannot afford to sit in the living room without doing anything. We are afraid. We have to consume. Some of us take refuge in eating: we go to the kitchen and open the refrigerator, and we eat in order not to think of these things. This is the practice of repression. We don't see it as repression, but we are actually practicing repression. We want to keep all these things down there, so we always invite someone or something to be sitting in the living room, and we close the door very carefully, so that these things will be unable to come up. And it works. We keep the living room busy, and the market will provide us with many means to keep this living room busy: television, radio, magazines, conversation, music, shows, and so on.

What happens, silently, is that we create a situation of bad circulation in our psyches. Our psyches are like our blood: they have to circulate well in order for us to be sane and healthy. If the blood does not circulate well, we'll have many kinds of trouble. Massage helps the blood to circulate better, or sometimes we take medicine to help the blood to circulate better. We know that good circulation of our blood is very important for the well being of our bodies, and if we exercise, we run, that is to help with our blood circulation. If we have a headache, it may mean that the blood is not circulating well, so massage can help. Because we have tried to suppress them, these things do not have a chance to come up any more, and that has created a situation of bad circulation in our psyche, and symptoms of mental illness can appear. They are there, and you believe that they are not active, but they are very active, day and night. They are acting from the depth of our being, and they shape our behavior, the way you behave here, as expressed by eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. The six senses are acting under the direction of the blocks of pain inside. You react in a particular way because the blocks of fear push you to react like that. If suddenly you panic, that is because of a block of fear in you, pushing you. So even if you try to block their way, they are still very important in your daily life, in shaping your behavior. This situation of bad circulation will result in the manifestation of symptoms of mental illness.

If you get depressed, don't think that the depression comes just like that. You have lived in such a way, you have dealt with your emotions, your sensations, your perceptions, in such a way that depression has become possible. Looking into the nature of your depression, you can find out how it has come to you. So, the answer is that blocking the way is not a healthy thing to do. You should be able to let it come up, but you are afraid. What you need is the Sangha and the Dharma. The Sangha can play the role of supporting you. The Dharma can play the role of helping you to develop the positive aspects in yourself. Mindfulness helps you to water the positive seeds in yourself. You are capable of contemplating the blue sky, you are capable of spending some time drinking tea with a friend, you are capable of walking meditation, in order to touch the wonders of life, and while doing so you strengthen the seed of mindfulness that is here in you. All of us have a seed of mindfulness. Maybe it is a little bit weak, but if you practice mindfulness of breathing, of walking, of eating, then that seed of mindfulness will become stronger and stronger.

When a block of pain manifests itself in the living room, your practice is to touch the seed of mindfulness, invite it to come up in order to take care of the block of pain that is there. Suppose this is your fear, or your anger. At that moment when your anger manifests itself, you have a zone of energy. Let's call it energy Number One. If you allow that energy to be alone in your living room, that would not be healthy. You've got to do something; you've got to practice. Your practice is to go back to your mindful breathing and touch the seed of mindfulness in you, and then you have the second zone of energy, called energy of mindfulness. This zone of energy is playing the role of a big brother or a big sister, embracing the pain. When the baby cries, the mother will come to the baby's room and pick the baby up, and hold the baby tenderly in her arms. You need to do exactly the same thing: "My little pain, I know you are there. I am here for you, taking care of you." That is the role of mindfulness. You hold your pain tenderly in your arms, and if you want the

energy of mindfulness to continue to be there, you can practice continuous mindful breathing or mindful walking, because the mother has to be there for some time before the pain of the baby can be relieved.

Mindfulness is the energy that helps you to be there, to be there for your happiness and to be there for your suffering. Suppose you were standing with a group of friends, looking in the direction of the sunset. Mindfulness helps you to be truly there, body and mind united. That is why you can touch the beautiful sunset deeply, you are truly alive, you are fully present, and the beautiful sunset is there for you. A few minutes of contemplating the beautiful sunset can be healing, can be nourishing. But if you stood there with other people, and your mind was preoccupied by something else, if you were absorbed into your fear about the future or your regret about the past, even standing there with a group of people, you are not really there. You are not mindful. You are not in the here and the now. That is why mindfulness helps you to bring your body and mind back together to produce your true presence, and that presence is essential for you to touch what is happening in the present moment. In this case it is not a beautiful sunset, but the block of pain that manifests within yourself. So mindfulness is there to take care of the pain. "My dear depression, I know you are there. I am here for you, taking care of you." You need to maintain your mindfulness alive, because the block of suffering is there, and needs to be attended to. We know that we are not only the mindfulness, but we are also the pain. The pain in us is not our enemy, it is us, it is our baby. We cannot run away from it, we have to embrace it, hold it tenderly in our arms, look deeply into it, take good care of it, and in that way we can transform it.

The practice is that every time your fear or your anger or your despair comes up, you should be able to invite your mindfulness to come up, and with mindful breathing, mindful walking, you embrace your pain as long as you need. After some time, a few minutes later, your pain will go down again in the form of a seed. "Seed" is a technical term in Buddhist psychology. *Bija* is the Sanskrit term. Every mental formation is there in the form of a seed. If someone comes and waters that seed it will sprout, and become a zone of energy up here. There are about fifty-one categories of mental formations here, and our fear, our anger, are just two of them. So there are positive mental formations and there are negative mental formations here. Positive mental formations have to be nourished, and negative mental formations have to be taken care of and transformed. You don't have to fight, because if you fight, you fight yourself--violence.

Buddhist meditation is based on the insight of non-duality. You are it. So the appropriate way is to deal with it non-violently, with tenderness. You embrace your pain tenderly, you recognize it, you don't try to suppress it. "Oh, my dear little pain, I know you are there. I am here for you, I will take good care of you." Mindfulness is strong in order to do the job. Your fear or your anger will go down after a moment, and become a little bit less important. Every time your pain is bathed in mindfulness, it will lose a little bit of its strength. If you practice you will see that. And the next time it comes up again, you do the same thing. "Hello, my pain, hello there, my despair, I know you are there. I am here, ready to be available for you." And you embrace it tenderly, in walking meditation, in sitting meditation, in mindful breathing. But you need to have this energy in order to do the job, and this energy is to be cultivated by the practice of mindfulness in the context, in the setting of a Sangha. That is why the Sangha is important.

If you have succeeded once in embracing and taking care, you are no longer afraid, you have confidence. Next time when your pain manifests you will do the same. In just a few weeks you can restore good circulation, and the symptoms of mental illness will begin to disappear. But that does not mean that you have to do it all by yourself; the Sangha can help you, the therapist can help you, the teacher can help you, the brothers and sisters in the Dharma can help you. If you think that your mindfulness is not strong enough for you to embrace your pain alone, you can ask a sister in the Dharma to sit close to you, a Dharma brother to sit close to you. He has his strength of mindfulness. "Dear sister, don't be afraid, I am here for you. I will take your hand. I will bring my mindfulness and join your mindfulness, and our mindfulness together will be enough for you to embrace your pain." Sometimes something is too heavy for one person to carry, and you divide the burden, with your friend coming to help you. And both of you can carry the heavy thing. The same thing is true here. If your block of pain is too heavy for you to carry, to embrace, then a Dharma sister or a Dharma brother can sit next to you and bring his or her support to you in embracing your pain. That has always been true. That is why, in the path of practice, to have a Dharma brother, to have a Dharma sister, is a wonderful thing.

Again, we need a Sangha. Without a Sangha I don't know how we can do it, how we can make it. Even if you learn a lot during a retreat, even if you know all the techniques of the practice, when you go back to your city, without a Sangha you can only continue for a few months, and after that your practice will decline until you abandon it completely. Without a Sangha you cannot go far. That is why taking refuge in the Sangha is a very crucial practice. In my country we used to say that when a tiger leaves his mountain to go to the lowland, the tiger will be caught by humans and killed. When a practitioner leaves his Sangha, he will lose his practice. That is why taking refuge in the Sangha is so important. Sangha building is very important. That is why we should find ways to set up a Sangha where we live, and try with our energy and time and resources to help improve the quality of the Sangha. That is for our protection and support, and for the

protection and support of many people in the area. You can be a Sangha builder, and if you can build a Sangha, you can help so many people.

Again, I say that taking refuge in the Sangha is not a declaration of faith, it is a practice. If you are a monk, or you are a nun, you have to build a Sangha. But if you are not a monk or a nun, you also have to build a Sangha. If you are a doctor, if you are a healer, if you are a therapist, if you are a parent and you want to protect your child, you have to build a Sangha, because the environment is so bad that you can be sure that your child will get wounded and sick in that environment. So as a parent you have to think of the future of your child. Build a Sangha. And you have to meet with other parents to practice looking deeply in order to start building a Sangha, an environment where your child is safe—it is very urgent. Meditation is not only for monks and nuns and those lay people who stay in practice centers. Meditation should be a thing that we have to do every day, right where we are, in our towns, in our cities, in our families. Please, in your Dharma discussions, discuss this: Sangha building for our protection and for the protection of our children and for the protection of our society.

(Three bells)

End of Dharma talk.

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## **Mindfulness Bell: A Profile of Thich Nhat Hanh**

**Trevor Carolan**

*Thich Nhat Hanh's ringing call to practice mindfulness and interconnection has inspired a worldwide movement of politically engaged Buddhists. "Where there is suffering," says the Vietnamese Zen master, "mindfulness responds with the energy of compassion."*

Somewhere during most experiences there occurs a climactic moment in which all that has gone before, and will come after, becomes fixed in the mind. For whatever reason, this defining moment thrives in the psyche as a kind of touchstone, and again and again we return to it in search of magic.

I am reminded of this during a recent gathering in San Francisco, where a global brain trust had been convened by the Mikhail Gorbachev Foundation USA for a "State of the World Forum."

The colloquium's luminaries were many and mixed: Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Rigoberta Menchu, South African Vice-President Thabo Mbeki, Jane Goodall, Dutch Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers, Fritjof Capra, Ted Turner, Sam Keen, Shirley MacLaine, Joan Halifax, Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica and the remarkable Mr. Gorbachev himself.

It was an obvious case of beatnik genius at the controls, the breakthrough pow-wow linking up the Esalen Institute, the Pentagon, the Fortune 500, and a grab-bag of stray cosmic tracers. Their purpose was to search for and articulate answers to certain fundamental challenges as humanity prepares to enter its next historic phase of development on this precious planet.

On the third day of this Forum heaviosity, though, a little man appeared as magically as Rumpelstiltskin. He arrived late at a mid-morning dialogue addressing the topic "Expanding the Boundaries of Humanness." The guest panel was Rupert Sheldrake, Deepak Chopra, Esalen Institute founder Michael Murphy and Episcopalian Dean Alan Jones. The late arrival was a Vietnamese Buddhist monk named Thich Nhat Hanh.

Discussion was free-ranging and abstract: how Descartes' three hundred year old notions of mechanistic science still impact on the Western world view of self, place and spiritual relevance; how pilgrimage became tourism; how telepathic communication with other star worlds is worth a shot. Michael Murphy discoursed on golf and Sri Aurobindo; Deepak Chopra thought the rational mind was inadequate to comprehend non-linear intelligence. Whew.

Somewhere between Dr. Chopra's scientific mysticism (or was it mystical science?) and someone else's view of Celtic pre-Christian pagan consciousness, I became aware of an increasing buzzy muddification of my frontal lobes. Then Dean Alan Jones introduced the final presenter.

A small man garbed in the drab brown robes of his Order, Thich Nhat Hanh spoke quietly, plaintively, in good English with occasional French inflections. His words and speech were restful, like a balm to the ears and conscience. Most everything about Thich Nhat Hanh was marked by calmness, a soft yin-ness that goes beyond simple stillness. When he spoke, it was with great mindfulness—a word, an action to which he is especially devoted.

Thich Nhat Hanh began with a story. "One day I was practicing mindful movement in a wood with the people of our community," he said softly. "Everyday we practice this, walking

slowly, mindfully, to enjoy every step; then we sit down.

"One day, I suddenly realized that the tree standing in front of me allowed my movement to be possible. I saw very clearly that I was able to breathe in because of its presence in front of me. It was standing there for me, and I was breathing in and out for the tree. I saw this connection very profoundly.

"In my tradition we speak of 'interbeing.' We cannot 'be' by ourself alone; we must be with everything else," he continued. "So, for example, we 'inter-are' with a tree: if it is not there, we are not there either.

"In the Diamond Sutra the Buddha advises us to consider four notions: the notions of self, of humanity, of living beings, and of life span. He also advises that the practice of removing these notions from mind is not difficult; anyone can do it."

After the previous discussion, what Thich Nhat Hanh had to say, and how he said it—without pyrotechnics or bombast; without jewelled elephants or eight-nectared realms; without pseudoscience or systems—was like a glass of hot tea on a raw day.

"If we observe things mindfully and profoundly," he explained, "we find out that self is made up only of non-self elements. If we look deeply into a flower, what do we see? We also see sunshine, a cloud, the earth, minerals, the gardener, the complete cosmos. Why? Because the flower is composed of these non-flower elements: that's what we find out. And, like this flower, our body too is made up of everything else—except for one element: a separate self or existence. This is the teaching of 'non-self' in Buddhism.

"In order to just be ourself, we must also take care of the non-self elements. We all know this, that we cannot be without other people, other species, but very often we forget that being is really inter-being; that living beings are made only of non-living elements.

"This is why we have to practice meditation—to keep alive this vision. The shamatha practice in my tradition is to nourish and keep alive this kind of insight twenty-four hours a day with the whole of our being."

About then, a radio correspondent leaned over to whisper inquiringly. "What exactly is his tradition anyway? Is it zen he's talking about, or is all of Buddhism like this?" The hard-boiled Capitol Hill reporter had been told that to understand what the environmental lobby was fuelled by these days, she ought to check out what the Buddhist monk from Vietnam had to say. I had queries of my own, however, since to rework a line from Andrei Codrescu, as a teacher Thich Nhat Hanh appears to cultivate anonymity with the kind of passion with which others cultivate publicity.

His students call him "Thay," Vietnamese for "Teacher." Born in 1926, Thich Nhat Hanh (pronounced Tick-Not-Hawn) has been a monk for fifty-three years, dedicating himself to the practice and transmission of "Engaged Buddhism," a root insight tradition melding meditation, awareness of the moment, and compassionate action as a means of taking care of our lives and society. In 1967, he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Dr. Martin Luther King for his peace work in Vietnam.

Arnie Kotler seemed like a good source of answers to my questions about Thich Nhat Hanh. Kotler is the publisher of many of Thich Nhat Hanh's seventy-five books and a board member of the Community of Mindful Living, a loose-knit umbrella organization of more than one hundred groups of students around the world practicing in Thich Nhat Hanh's tradition of living mindfully, daily, in the moment.

"Thay is a zen teacher," Kotler related. "He's lived in Plum Village, a contemplative community near Bordeaux, France, since 1966. Originally he's from Vietnam-Indochina—so

there may be an assumption that he's from a Theravada tradition. Thay likes to remind people that Indochina was influenced by both India and China, and that Indian Buddhism especially means a lot to him. Vietnam's Unified Buddhist Church, which is suppressed there by the government, is a combination of mahayana and Theravada traditions."

Placing Thich Nhat Hanh's background in context is useful, Kotler says, "because we tend to think of zen mostly as Japanese; yet that's only one manifestation, the one best known in the West. Thay practices in the forty-second generation of Lin-Chi's (in Japanese, Rinzai) chan/zen Buddhism. The particular Vietnamese offshoot of this original Tang Chinese lineage is known as the Bamboo Forest School.

"Thay is in its eighth or ninth generation and he's very much embedded in the fullness of these traditions. During the 1960's, when his Vietnam Peace activism was at its height, he also founded a lay order called Tiep Hien, or 'Interbeing.' It's in this mindfulness tradition that he's empowered fifty of his students to teach."

This helps explain the formidable group of teachers, writers and activists who in various capacities are affiliated with the growing "engaged Buddhism" movement Thich Nhat Hanh has inspired—Joan Halifax, Joanna Macy, Deena Metzger, bell hooks, Wendy Johnson, Maxine Hong Kingston and others. The San Francisco leg of Thich Nhat Hanh's recent U.S. visit brought out distinguished teachers such as Jack Kornfield, Sylvia Boorstein and Ram Dass.

At Spirit Rock, the Marin County dharma centre inspired by Jack Kornfeld and other teachers, Thich Nhat Hanh led a "Day of Mindfulness" that drew more than two thousand people to the former nature conservancy's natural amphitheater.

Happily, a mindful carpool shuttle introduced me to new friends en route, so I was not alone in the large crowd. The landscape was beautiful—flowing ridges, woodland and moor. The event was an example of North American Buddhism par excellence. The day-long outdoor program included meditation, mindful walking, music and song, silent eating, an offbeat organic "apple" meditation by Ed Brown, and a lengthy, absorbing dharma talk by Master Hanh that became a Sermon in the Vale.

"Today, communication has expanded greatly throughout the world," Master Hanh remarked. "E-mail, fax, voice pager—you can contact New York from Tokyo in half a minute so easily. Yet in families and in neighborhoods, between husbands and wives, between friends and each other, real communication is still difficult. Suffering continues, pain increases.

"In our time, many young people also do not feel connected with anything, so they look for something to get relief—alcohol, drugs, money—or they turn on the TV set, absorbing violence and insecurity. How then can the dharma help dysfunctional, emotionally hurt individuals?" he asked.

"Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara is a very good listener, a compassionate listener," he offered. "We need to rediscover a way to talk and listen to each other as in a loving family. But what technology can help with this? I feel the need is for practice, for mindful listening. A heart free to listen is a flower that blooms on the tree of practice."

Listening to Thich Nhat Hanh one gradually attunes to the meditation bell which is much a part of his practice path. The mindfulness bell is the voice of our spiritual ancestors, he instructs: "Its sounds call us back to our true home in the present moment—to emptiness. When we inter-are, we find peace, stability, freedom—the root of our happiness. With non-self we discover the nature of emptiness."

Thich Nhat Hanh recommends study and chanting of the Heart Sutra as a means of understanding how everything can be empty of separate self, while at the same time being

full of everything else in the cosmos. In this dharma realm, he says, "Birth, death, being and non-being do not truly exist." They are simply notions, he observes, and the practice of the Heart Sutra is the practice of removing all ideas.

What becomes clear is that what Thich Nhat Hanh teaches is not so much "Buddhism" as steady perseverance in meditative practice. "Deep listening," "deep touching," "deep seeing"-his interpretations of Vipashyana meditation are as applicable to Christian, Jewish, Taoist or other spiritual traditions as they are to Buddhism, whatever sect you fancy. In looking at my notes on the nine days in which I had opportunity to follow, listen and sit in his presence, I realized how seldom he discourses on Buddhist theology-a point known to raise eyebrows among purists.

"That's correct; Thay doesn't talk about Buddhism much," agrees Arnie Kotler. "He talks about practice. As Trungpa Rinpoche informed us in his first book, *Meditation In Action*, meditation is Buddhism's core practice. That's very much what Thich Nhat Hanh is offering: meditation in activity."

"Is he charismatic?" an old friend grown wise, but in weakened health, inquired one afternoon in Golden Gate park.

"No," I answered her, surprised a little by my response. "Not in the usual sense. But he's the real thing. And he's a poet. My Vietnamese friends call him a Living Buddha."

As a martial artist of long years I share a taste for masters like Diogenes the Dog and Chuang-tzu, who on meeting emperors brought notice to the world in their own unique fashion. So it was when Thich Nhat Hanh spoke again at the State of the World Forum, this time to Mr. Gorbachev and the eminences arrayed.

"Intellect alone is not enough to guide us," Master Hanh declared to them humbly. "To shape the future of the twenty-first century we need something else. Without peace and happiness we cannot take care of ourselves; we cannot take care of other species and we cannot take care of the world.

"That is why it is important for us to live in such a way that every moment we are there deeply with our true presence, always alive and nourishing the insight of Interbeing."

Interspersed in his talk were observations from Living Buddha, Living Christ. A brilliant articulation of his belief in a Living Holiness shared by both East and West, this new book establishes a basis for the "New World Dharma" pointed to in such landmark texts of recent years as William Irwin Thompson's *Pacific Shift*, Gary Snyder's *Practice of the Wild*, and Alan Hunt Badiner's eco-Buddhist compendium *Dharma Gaia*.

To me, mindfulness is very much like the Holy Spirit," he explained to the assembly of the powerful. "All of us have the seed of the Holy Spirit in us; the capacity of healing, transforming and loving. Where there is suffering, mindfulness responds with the energy of compassion and understanding. Compassion is where the rivers of Christianity and Buddhism meet.

"In the Christian and Jewish traditions, we learn to live in the presence of God," he affirmed. "Our Buddhist equivalent is the practice of cultivating mindfulness, of living deeply every moment with the energy of the Holy Spirit. If we change our daily lives-the way we think, speak and act-we begin to change the world.

"This is what I discussed with Dr. Martin Luther King many years ago; that the practice of mindfulness is not just for hours of silent meditation, but for every moment of the day. Other teachers, like St. Basil, have said it is possible to pray as we work, and in Vietnam, we invented 'Engaged Buddhism' so we could continue our contemplative life in the midst of

helping the victims of war. We worked to relieve the suffering while trying to maintain our own mindfulness.

"So to conclude, the practice of looking deeply does not mean being inactive. We become very active with our understanding. Non-violence does not mean non-action. It means we act with love and compassion, living in such a way that a future will be possible for our children and their children. Thank you."

It happened then. The temporality of language and power was reduced for a prolonged still moment to reverberant silence, to presentness. There was nothing left to say. The monk gathered himself, rose and departed as anonymously as he'd arrived. I'd remember this.

Sometime during the visit I'd asked him about the mystery of death: what happens when we die? Thich Nhat Hanh knows how to laugh. "Nothing is born. Nothing dies. That is a statement made by Lavoisier-not a Buddhist," he responded with something like a smile. "But as we know, Buddhists too are made up only of non-Buddhist elements"

At the Forum, the sound of women singing, nuns in his Order, drifted up from a place nearby. "Breathing-in Breathing out," they sang, "Breathing in... Breathing out." Then an echo up the halls of the noble old hotel: "I am free, I am free, I am free"

I thought for a moment of St. Francis of Assisi, then looking about the room at my speechless companions, I could have sworn I saw the universe smile.

Three Poems by Thich Nhat Hanh, first two from his book "PEACE IS EVERY STEP". Peace is every step. The shining red sun is my heart. Each flower smiles with me. How green, how fresh all that grows. How cool the wind blows. Peace is every step. It turns the endless path to joy.

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Do not say that I'll depart tomorrow because even today I still arrive. Look deeply: I arrive in every second to be a bud on a spring branch, to be a tiny bird, with wings still fragile, learning to sing in my new nest, to be a caterpillar in the heart of a flower, to be a jewel hiding itself in a stone. I still arrive, in order to laugh and to cry, in order to fear and to hope. The rhythm of my heart is the birth and death of all that are alive. I am the mayfly metamorphosing on the surface of the river, and I am the bird which, when spring comes, arrives in time to eat the mayfly. I am the frog swimming happily in the clear pond, and I am also the grass-snake who, approaching in silence, feeds itself on the frog. I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones, my legs as thin as bamboo sticks, and I am the arms Merchant, selling deadly weapons to Uganda. I am the twelve-year-old girl, refugee on a small boat, who throws herself into the ocean after being raped by a sea pirate, and I am the pirate, my heart not yet capable of seeing and loving. I am a member of the politburo, with plenty of power in my hands, and I am the man who has to pay his

"debt of blood" to my people, dying slowly in a forced labor camp. My joy is like spring, so warm it makes flowers bloom in all walks of life. My pain is like a river of tears, so full it fills the four oceans. Please call me by my true names, so I can hear all my cries and laughs at once, so I can see that my joy and pain are one. Please call me by my true names, so I can wake up, and so the door of my heart can be left open, the door of compassion.

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You are me and I am you. It is obvious that we are inter-are. You cultivate the flower in yourself so that I will be beautiful. I transform the garbage in myself so that you do not have to suffer. I support you you support me. I am here to bring you peace you are here to bring me joy.<end of file>