

All in One

One in All

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Thich Nhat Hanh

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Please pass this book around should you feel that you do not need it anymore. As the Buddha taught, the gift of Truth excels all other gifts! May all have the chance to know the Dharma.

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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 non-hatred, 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 like a 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 breath 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 breath 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 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 your 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 isn't 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 were always practicing 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 — *Anāpanasati*. 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 you 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 positive feeds 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 you 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 you 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, but 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 up 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]

"Taking Good Care of Our Habit Energies" is a Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 16, 1997 in Plum Village, France.

All in One, One in All

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 just be 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 do 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

the talents, all the beauties, all the 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 into 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 create 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 the distribution of one seed to each one of you. 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 or drink anything, you suffered. And suddenly your mother came and put her hand on your forehead. You felt so good, and sometimes you wish that you still had that hand, that wonderful hand with you at any time you suffer. 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 there. 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 no light, no heat, no warmth, and no food, no fresh vegetables. You can see that the sun is like a father and like a 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 future, 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 is 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 Lokadhatu: 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 him. 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 goodbye, 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 have 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 was

only a manifested body of the Buddha. The true Buddha was not around 2600 years ago only: the true Buddha is the one 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 how 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 that is the nature of everything. It 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 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.

"All in One, One in All" is a Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on August 11, 1997 in Plum Village, France.

Going to the Shore of Non-suffering

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 with 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 is 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. It is 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 peace and 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 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 one 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; may be your child, 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 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 persons 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 not 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 too. 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, not 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. 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 for 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 the 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 other five 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 *vīrya*. 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 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 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 — and 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 had already followed my father to the sea to help him with fishing. I had seen girls and boys who were dressed in beautiful clothes, 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 surfacing very strongly — there is no policeman around, there is freedom, you can do anything 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 also saw that along the coast of Thailand, two hundred to three hundred babies were born to poor fishermen that night. 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 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 non-discrimination, 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 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 seeds in him and try to transform them, 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 August 13, 1997 in Plum Village, France.

Overcoming the Fear of Death

My dear friends, today is the twenty-eighth of July 1997 and we are in the Upper Hamlet. I remember 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 and 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 take 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 accepted to stay for one more 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 were very nice. They were very kind to him. So he decided to stay for another day and in this way 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 attire and goes to the living room and sits very comfortably and watches television, like going to the cinema. It's like a ritual. Imagine, Grandma puts on her best attire 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 as a 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 doing a session of total relaxation together 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 just 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 show 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, 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 gets together and conducts 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 went 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, 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.

To make other people happy, to love other people, an unhappy person has to take care of and love himself or herself first. In Plum Village, we offer him or 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 non-fear. Because without non-fear, you cannot be at your best in order to help him or 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.

Without talented monks like Shariputra, Moggallana, 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." 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 the number of disciples who were 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 day-time yet. He went alone and he continued to walk until he arrived at Venuvana. It was still wee hours 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 approaching, although he couldn't see very clearly. Finally, he realized that this person could be the Buddha. 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. They sat down for a conversation, about 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. In order to dissuade him, Prince Jeta 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 you say 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 one 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 disciple. Anathapindika said that he had only one thing that he was sorry about. He was very satisfied with his life, his family, his practice. He was only sorry about one thing: that he was 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 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 arrived, Anathapindika could not sit up on 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 was "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 the three of them practice together recollecting the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Shariputra was 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 it, the Sangha is for you. So after practicing recollecting 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 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 switched 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 started 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 is 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 and end with the element air.

Then they came 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 practiced looking into the nature of causes and conditions.

Anathapindika was practicing because he knows the two monks very well. They were both beloved disciples of the Buddha and were 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 arises is due to causes and conditions. Everything 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 comes to be is 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 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. 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? 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. I practice very well." "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 lay people too.” 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 have 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 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 that is the 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 another half hour or more and we had to leave for 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 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. It is 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 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 already begin 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 will hold their traditional bowl with this mudra. Two fingers to support 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 *gatha* 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.

“Overcoming the Fear of Death” is a Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh on July 28, 1997 in Plum Village, France.

Five Mindfulness Trainings

The First Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed 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.

The Second Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to cultivate loving kindness and learn ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am committed to practice 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 cultivate responsibility and learn 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 cultivate 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 committed to learn to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to criticize 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 will 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 cultivate good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I am committed to 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 programs, 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 practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society.

Unified Buddhist Church

The Most Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh (Th,y), our spiritual teacher, founded the Unified Buddhist Church (Eglise Bouddhique Unifiée) in France in 1969, during the Vietnam war. Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, a poet, a scholar, and a peace activist. His life long efforts to generate peace and reconciliation moved Martin Luther King, Jr. to nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967. He founded the Van Hanh Buddhist University in Saigon and the School for Youths of Social Services in Vietnam. When not traveling the world to teach “The Art of Mindful Living”, he teaches, writes, and gardens in Plum Village, France, a Buddhist monastery for monks and nuns and a mindfulness practice center for lay people.

The Unified Buddhist Church established Sweet Potatoes Community in 1975, Plum Village in 1982, the Dharma Cloud Temple and the Dharma Nectar Temple in 1988, and the Adornment of Loving Kindness Temple in 1995. Thich Nhat Hanh’s sangha (community of practice) in France is usually referred to as the Plum Village Sangha. During the course of the year, Plum Village welcomes thousands of retreatants from all over the world. Due to its rapid expansion in recent years, the community now comprises seven hamlets:

Upper Hamlet, Middle Hamlet, West Hamlet and Lower Hamlet, New Hamlet, Gatehouse New Hamlet and Hillside New Hamlet. The Unified Buddhist Church also has a mindfulness practice center called Intersein in Bavaria, Germany. A sangha of about 100 monks, nuns and resident lay-practitioners live permanently in Plum Village.

Since 1994, we have been exploring opportunities to establish our presence in the United States of America. In 1997, a generous donor offered us a 120-acre property in Woodstock, Vermont. This enabled us to set up the Maple Forest Monastery. In 1998, with the help of the same donor, we were able to acquire a 120-acre property in Hartland-Four-Corners, Vermont to set up the Green Mountain Dharma Center nunnery. We also set up the Mindfulness Practice Center (MPC) of Queechee, Vermont, the first center of its kind in the United States. A sangha of monks and nuns lives and practices in our monastery and nunnery and a team of lay practitioners practice in and take care of our MPC in Vermont. In May 2000, we established Deer Park Monastery, our West Coast Center, in Escondido, San Diego County, California. You are welcome to visit us in France as well as in Vermont and California. .

The Unified Buddhist Church Inc. (UBC), a non-profit corporation, was founded in 1998 to officially represent Thich Nhat Hanh and his Sangha in the United States of America.

It is a sister organization of Unified Buddhist Church (Eglise Bouddhique Unifiée) founded in France. The UBC in America is represented by Sr. Annabel, Abbess of the Green Mountain Dharma Center. The Green Mountain Dharma Center acts as the headquarters of the Unified Buddhist Church in the U.S.

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Unified Buddhist Church, Inc. is qualified by the IRS as a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. Our EIN is 03-0356845.

To find out more about plum village, please visit

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