Discourse on Love ♪

"He or she who wants to attain peace should practice being upright, humble, and capable of using loving speech. He or she will know how to live simply and happily, with senses calmed, without being covetous and carried away by the emotions of the majority. Let him or her not do anything that will be disapproved of by the wise ones.

"(And this is what he or she contemplates:)

"May everyone be happy and safe, and may all hearts be filled with joy.

"May all beings live in security and in peace—beings who are frail or strong, tall or short, big or small, invisible or visible, near or far away, already born, or yet to be born. May all of them dwell in perfect tranquility.

"Let no one do harm to anyone. Let no one put the life of anyone in danger. Let no one, out of anger or ill will, wish anyone any harm.

"Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, cultivate boundless love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos. Let our boundless love pervade the whole universe, above, below, and across. Our love will know no obstacles. Our heart will be absolutely free from hatred and enmity. Whether standing or walking, sitting or lying, as long as we are awake, we should maintain this mindfulness of love in our own heart. This is the noblest way of living.

"Free from wrong views, greed, and sensual desires, living in beauty and realizing Perfect Understanding, those who practice boundless love will certainly transcend birth and death."

Etena sacca vajjena sotthi te hotu sabbada.
[REPEAT THREE TIMES]
[By the firm determination of this truth, may you ever be well.]

Metta Sutta, Sutta Nipata 1.8*

* For commentary, see Thich Nhat Hanh, *Teachings on Love* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1998).

Discourse on Happiness

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when the Lord was living in the vicinity of Savatthi at the Anathapindika Monastery in the Jeta Grove. Late at night, a deva appeared whose light and beauty made the whole Jeta Grove shine radiantly. After paying respects to the Buddha, the deva asked him a question in the form of a verse:

"Many gods and men are eager to know
what are the greatest blessings
which bring about a peaceful and happy life.
Please, Tathagata, will you teach us?"

(This is the Buddha's answer:)

"Not to be associated with the foolish ones,
to live in the company of wise people,
honoring those who are worth honoring—
this is the greatest happiness.

"To live in a good environment,
to have planted good seeds,
and to realize that you are on the right path—
this is the greatest happiness.

"To have a chance to learn and grow,
to be skillful in your profession or craft,
practicing the precepts and loving speech—
this is the greatest happiness.

"To be able to serve and support your parents,
to cherish your own family,
to have a vocation that brings you joy—
this is the greatest happiness.

"To live honestly, generous in giving,
to offer support to relatives and friends,

living a life of blameless conduct—
this is the greatest happiness.

"To avoid unwholesome actions,
not caught by alcoholism or drugs,
and to be diligent in doing good things—
this is the greatest happiness.

"To be humble and polite in manner,
to be grateful and content with a simple life,
not missing the occasion to learn the Dharma—
this is the greatest happiness.

"To persevere and be open to change,
to have regular contact with monks and nuns,
and to fully participate in Dharma discussions—
this is the greatest happiness.

"To live diligently and attentively,
to perceive the Noble Truths,
and to realize nirvana—
this is the greatest happiness.

"To live in the world
with your heart undisturbed by the world,
with all sorrows ended, dwelling in peace—
this is the greatest happiness.

"For he or she who accomplishes this,
unvanquished wherever she goes,
always he is safe and happy—
happiness lives within oneself."

Mahamangala Sutta, Sutta Nipata 2.4*

* For further commentary, see *Two Treasures: Buddhist Teachings on Awakening and True Happiness* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2007).

Elder Discourse

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when the Lord was staying at the monastery in the Jeta Grove, in the town of Shravasti. At that time there was a monk named Thera (Elder), who always preferred to be alone. Whenever he could, he praised the practice of living alone. He sought alms alone and sat in meditation alone.

One time a group of bhikshus came to the Lord, paid their respect by prostrating at his feet, stepped to one side, sat down at a distance, and said, "Blessed One, there is an elder by the name of Thera who only wants to be alone. He always praises the practice of living alone. He goes into the village alone to seek alms, returns home from the village alone, and sits in meditation alone."

The Lord Buddha told one of the bhikshus, "Please go to the place where the monk Thera lives and tell him I wish to see him."

The bhikshu obeyed. When the monk Thera heard the Buddha's wish, he came without delay, prostrated at the feet of the Buddha, stepped to one side, and sat down at a distance. Then the Blessed One asked the monk Thera, "Is it true that you prefer to be alone, praise the life of solitude, go for alms alone, come back from the village alone, and sit in meditation alone?"

The monk Thera replied, "It is true, Blessed One."

Buddha asked the monk Thera, "How do you live alone?"

The monk Thera replied, "I live alone; no one else lives with me. I praise the practice of being alone. I go for alms alone, and I come back from the village alone. I sit in meditation alone. That is all."

The Buddha taught the monk as follows, "It is obvious that you like the practice of living alone. I do not want to deny that, but I want to tell you that there is a more wonderful and profound way to be alone. It is the way of deep observation in order to see that the past no longer exists and the future has not yet come, and to dwell at ease in the present moment, free from desire. When a person lives in this way, he has no hesitation in his heart. He gives up all anxieties and regrets, lets go of all binding desires, and cuts the fetters which prevent him from being free. This is called 'the better way to live alone.' There is no more wonderful way of being alone than this."

Then the Blessed One recited this gatha:

"Observing life deeply,
it is possible to clearly see all that is.
Not enslaved by anything,
it is possible to put aside all craving,
resulting in a life of peace and joy.
This is truly to live alone."

Hearing the Lord's words, the monk Thera was delighted. He prostrated respectfully to the Buddha and departed.

Samyukta Agama 1071
(The equivalent in the Pali Canon is
Theranamo Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya 21.10*)

* For commentary, see Thich Nhat Hanh, *Our Appointment with Life* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1990).

Discourse on Knowing the Better Way To Live Alone

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when the Lord was staying at the monastery in the Jeta Grove, in the town of Savatthi. He called all the monks to him and instructed them, "Bhikkhus!"

And the bhikkhus replied, "We are here."

The Blessed One taught, "I will teach you what is meant by 'knowing the better way to live alone.' I will begin with an outline of the teaching, and then I will give a detailed explanation. Bhikkhus, please listen carefully."

"Blessed One, we are listening."

The Buddha taught:

"Do not pursue the past.
Do not lose yourself in the future.
The past no longer is.
The future has not yet come.
Looking deeply at life as it is
in the very here and now,
the practitioner dwells
in stability and freedom.
We must be diligent today.
To wait till tomorrow is too late.
Death comes unexpectedly.
How can we bargain with it?
The sage calls a person who
dwells in mindfulness
night and day
'the one who knows
the better way to live alone.'

"Bhikkhus, what do we mean by 'pursuing the past'? When someone considers the way her body was in the past, the way her feelings were in the past, the way her perceptions were in the past, the way her mental formations were in the past, the way her consciousness was in the past; when she considers these things and her mind is burdened by and attached to these things which belong to the past, then that person is pursuing the past.

"Bhikkhus, what is meant by 'not pursuing the past'? When someone

considers the way her body was in the past, the way her feelings were in the past, the way her perceptions were in the past, the way her mental formations were in the past, the way her consciousness was in the past; when she considers these things but her mind is neither enslaved by nor attached to these things which belong to the past, then that person is not pursuing the past.

"Bhikkhus, what is meant by 'losing yourself in the future'? When someone considers the way his body will be in the future, the way his feelings will be in the future, the way his perceptions will be in the future, the way his mental formations will be in the future, the way his consciousness will be in the future; when he considers these things and his mind is burdened by and daydreaming about these things which belong to the future, then that person is losing himself in the future.

"Bhikkhus, what is meant by 'not losing yourself in the future'? When someone considers the way his body will be in the future, the way his feelings will be in the future, the way his perceptions will be in the future, the way his mental formations will be in the future, the way his consciousness will be in the future; when he considers these things but his mind is not burdened by or daydreaming about these things which belong to the future, then he is not losing himself in the future.

"Bhikkhus, what is meant by 'being swept away by the present'? When someone does not study or learn anything about the Awakened One, or the teachings of love and understanding, or the community that lives in harmony and awareness; when that person knows nothing about the noble teachers and their teachings, and does not practice these teachings, and thinks, 'This body is myself; I am this body. These feelings are myself; I am these feelings. This perception is myself; I am this perception. This mental formation is myself; I am this mental formation. This consciousness is myself; I am this consciousness,' then that person is being swept away by the present.

"Bhikkhus, what is meant by 'not being swept away by the present'? When someone studies and learns about the Awakened One, the teachings of love and understanding, and the community that lives in harmony and awareness; when that person knows about noble teachers and their teachings, practices these teachings, and does not think, 'This body is myself; I am this body. These feelings are myself; I am these feelings. This perception is myself; I am this perception. This mental formation is myself; I am this mental formation. This consciousness is myself; I am this consciousness,' then that person is not being swept away by the present.

"Bhikkhus, I have presented the outline and the detailed explanation of knowing the better way to live alone."

Thus the Buddha taught, and the bhikkhus were delighted to put his teachings into practice.

Bhaddekaratta Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 131*

* For commentary, see Thich Nhat Hanh, *Our Appointment with Life* (Berkeley. CA: Parallax Press, 1990).

Discourse on the Four Kinds of Nutriments

This is what I heard one time when the Buddha was in the Anathapindika Monastery in the Jeta Grove near to the town of Shravasti.

That day the Buddha told the monks: "There are four kinds of nutriments which enable living beings to grow and maintain life. What are these four nutriments? The first is edible food, the second is the food of sense impressions, the third is the food of volition, and the fourth is the food of consciousness."

"Bhikkhus, how should a practitioner regard edible food? Imagine a young couple with a baby boy whom they look after and raise with all their love. One day they decide to bring their son to another country to make their living. They have to go through the difficulties and dangers of a desert. During the journey, they run out of provisions and fall extremely hungry. There is no way out for them and they discuss the following plan: 'We only have one son whom we love with all our heart. If we eat his flesh we shall survive and manage to overcome this dangerous situation. If we do not eat his flesh all three of us will die.' After this discussion, they killed their son, with tears of pain and gritting their teeth they ate the flesh of their son, just so as to be able to live and come out of the desert."

The Buddha asked: "Do you think that couple ate their son's flesh because they wanted to enjoy its taste and because they wanted their bodies to have the nutriment that would make them more beautiful?"

The monks replied: "No, Venerable Lord." The Buddha asked: "Were the couple forced to eat their son's flesh in order to survive and escape from the dangers of the desert?" The monks replied: "Yes, Venerable Lord."

The Buddha taught: "Monks, every time we ingest edible food, we should train ourselves to look at it as our son's flesh. If we meditate on it in this way we shall have clear insight and understanding, which puts an end to misperceptions about edible food and our attachment to sensual pleasures will dissolve. Once the attachment to sensual pleasures is transformed there are no longer any internal formations concerning the five objects of sensual pleasure in the noble disciple who applies himself to the training and the practice. When the internal formations still bind us we have to keep returning to this world.

"How should the practitioner meditate on the food of sense impressions? Imagine a cow which has lost its skin. Wherever it goes the insects and

maggots which live in the earth, in the dust and on the vegetation attach themselves to the cow and suck its blood. If the cow lies on the earth, the maggots in the earth will attach themselves to it and feed off of it. Whether lying down or standing up, the cow will be irritated and suffer pain. When you ingest the food of sense impressions, you should practice to see it in this light. You will have insight and understanding which puts an end to misperceptions concerning the food of sense impressions. When you have this insight you will no longer be attached to the three kinds of feeling. When no longer attached to the three kinds of feeling, the noble disciple does not need to strive anymore because whatever needs to be done has already been done.

"How should the practitioner meditate on the food of volition? Imagine there is a village or a large town near to a pit of burning charcoal. There are only the smokeless, glowing embers left. Now there is an intelligent man with enough wisdom who does not want to suffer and only wants happiness and peace. He does not want to die and he only wants to live. He thinks: 'Over there the heat is very great, although there is no smoke and there are no flames. Still, if I have to go into that pit there is no doubt that I shall die.' Knowing this he is determined to leave that large town or that village and go somewhere else. The practitioner should meditate like this on the food of volition. Meditating like this he will have insight and understanding which puts an end to misperceptions about the food of volition. When he arrives at that understanding the three kinds of craving will be ended. When these three cravings are ended, the noble disciple who trains and practices will have no more work to do, because whatever needs to be done has already been done.

"How should the practitioner meditate on the food of consciousness? Imagine that the soldiers of the king have arrested a criminal. They bind him and bring him to the king. Because he has committed theft he is punished by people piercing his body with three hundred knives. He is assailed by fear and pain all day and all night. The practitioner should regard the food of consciousness in this light. If he does he will have insight and understanding, which puts an end to misperceptions concerning the food of consciousness. When he has this understanding regarding the food of consciousness the noble disciple who trains and practices will not need to strive anymore because whatever needs to be done has been done."

When the Buddha had spoken, the monks were very happy to put the teachings into practice.

Samyukta Agama, Sutra 373*

* For commentary on this sutra, see Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Mindfulness Survival Kit* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2014).

Discourse on the Middle Way

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when the Lord was staying at the guest house in a forest of the district of Nala. At that time, the Venerable Kacchayana came to visit him and asked, "The Tathagata has spoken of Right View. How would the Tathagata describe Right View?"

The Buddha told the venerable monk, "People in the world tend to believe in one of two views: the view of being or the view of nonbeing. That is because they are bound to wrong perception. It is wrong perception that leads to the concepts of being and nonbeing. Kaccayana, most people are bound to the internal formations of discrimination and preference, grasping and attachment. Those who are not bound to the internal knots of grasping and attachment no longer imagine and cling to the idea of a self. They understand, for example, that suffering comes to be when conditions are favorable, and that it fades away when conditions are no longer favorable. They no longer have any doubts. Their understanding has not come to them through others; it is their own insight. This insight is called Right View, and this is the way the Tathagata would describe Right View.

"How is this so? When a person who has correct insight observes the coming to be of the world, the idea of nonbeing does not arise in her, and when she observes the fading away of the world, the idea of being does not arise in her mind. Kaccayana, viewing the world as being is an extreme; viewing it as nonbeing is another extreme. The Tathagata avoids these two extremes and teaches the Dharma dwelling in the Middle Way.

"The Middle Way says that this is, because that is; this is not, because that is not. Because there is ignorance, there are impulses; because there are impulses, there is consciousness; because there is consciousness, there is the psyche-soma; because there is the psyche-soma, there are the six senses; because there are the six senses, there is contact; because there is contact, there is feeling; because there is feeling, there is craving; because there is craving, there is grasping; because there is grasping, there is becoming; because there is becoming, there is birth; because there is birth, there are old age, death, grief, and sorrow. That is how this entire mass of suffering arises. But with the fading away of ignorance, impulses cease; with the fading away of impulses, consciousness ceases; …and finally birth, old age, death, grief, and sorrow will fade away. That is how this entire mass of suffering ceases."

After listening to the Buddha, the Venerable Kaccayana was enlightened and liberated from sorrow. He was able to untie all of his internal knots and attain arhatship.

Samyukta Agama 301*

* For commentary on this sutra, see Thich Nhat Hanh, *Beyond the Self* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2010).

Anuradha Discourse

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when the Lord was staying in the gabled house in the Great Forest near the town of Vesali. At that time, the Venerable Anuradha was staying in a hermitage in the forest not far from where the Buddha was. One day a group of recluses came to see the Venerable Anuradha, and after exchanging greetings and courtesies, asked the venerable monk, "Venerable Anuradha, the Tathagata is often praised for having reached the highest fruit of awakening. He must have explained to you his understanding of these four propositions:

1. "After death, the Tathagata continues to exist.
2. "After death, the Tathagata ceases to exist.
3. "After death, the Tathagata both continues and ceases to exist.
4. "After death, the Tathagata neither continues nor ceases to exist.

"Please tell us which of these propositions is true."

The Venerable Anuradha replied, "Friends, the Tathagata, the World-Honored One, the one who has realized the highest fruit of awakening, has never proposed or spoken about these four propositions."

When they heard the Venerable Anuradha's reply, the recluses said, "It is possible that this monk has just been ordained, or if he was ordained some time ago, he must be of slow wits." Not satisfied with Venerable Anuradha's answer, they left him, thinking that he was either newly ordained or of little intelligence.

When the recluses had gone, the Venerable Anuradha thought, "If recluses continue to ask me these questions, how should I answer so as to speak the truth and not misrepresent the teachings of the Buddha? How should I answer so as to be in harmony with the right Dharma and not to be criticized by the adherents of the Buddha's path?" Then Anuradha went to where the Buddha was staying, bowed to the Buddha, spoke words of greeting, and then told the Buddha what had happened.

The Buddha asked him, "What do you think, Anuradha? Can you find the Tathagata in form?"

"No, World-Honored One."

"Can you find the Tathagata outside of form?"

"No, World-Honored One."

"Can you find the Tathagata in feelings, perceptions, mental formations, or consciousness?"

"No, World-Honored One."

"Can you find the Tathagata outside of feelings, perceptions, mental formations, or consciousness?"

"No, World-Honored One."

"Well then, Anuradha, do you think that the Tathagata transcends form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness?"

"No, World-Honored One."

"Anuradha, if you cannot find the Tathagata even while he is still alive, can you find the Tathagata within these four propositions:

1. "After death, the Tathagata continues to exist.
2. "After death, the Tathagata ceases to exist.
3. "After death, the Tathagata both continues and ceases to exist.
4. "After death, the Tathagata neither continues nor ceases to exist."

"No, World-Honored One."

"Quite so, Anuradha. The Tathagata has only spoken and taught in relation to one thing: suffering and the end of suffering."

Samyutta Nikaya IV.380

Discourse on the Full Awareness of Breathing

I

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when he was staying in Savatthi in the Eastern Park, with many well-known and accomplished disciples, including Sariputta, Mahamoggallana, Mahakassapa, Mahakacchayana, Mahakotthita, Mahakappina, Mahachunda, Anuradha, Revata, and Ananda. The senior bhikkhus in the community were diligently instructing bhikkhus who were new to the practice—some instructing ten bhikkhus, some twenty, some thirty, and some forty; and in this way the bhikkhus who were new to the practice gradually made great progress.

That night the moon was full, and the Pavarana Ceremony was held to mark the end of the rainy-season retreat. Lord Buddha, the Awakened One, was sitting in the open air, and his disciples were gathered around him. After looking over the assembly, he began to speak:

"O bhikkhus, I am pleased to observe the fruit you have attained in your practice. Yet I know you can make even more progress. What you have not yet attained, you can attain. What you have not yet realized, you can realize perfectly. [To engage your efforts,] I will remain here until the next full-moon day."

When they heard that the Lord Buddha was going to remain in Savatthi for another month, bhikkhus throughout the country began traveling there to study with him. The senior bhikkhus continued teaching the bhikkhus new to the practice even more ardently. Some were instructing ten bhikkhus, some twenty, some thirty, and some forty. With this help, the newer bhikkhus were able, little by little, to continue their progress in understanding.

When the next full-moon day arrived, the Buddha, seated under the open sky, looked over the assembly of bhikkhus and began to speak:

"O bhikkhus, our community is pure and good. At its heart, it is without useless and boastful talk, and therefore it deserves to receive offerings and be considered a field of merit. Such a community is rare, and any pilgrim who seeks it, no matter how far he must travel, will find it worthy.

"O bhikkhus, there are bhikkhus in this assembly who have realized the fruit of Arhatship, destroyed every root of affliction, laid aside every burden, and attained right understanding and emancipation. There are also bhikkhus who have cut off the first five internal knots and realized the fruit of never returning to the cycle of birth and death.

"There are those who have thrown off the first three internal knots and realized the fruit of returning once more. They have cut off the roots of greed, hatred, and ignorance, and will only need to return to the cycle of birth and death one more time. There are those who have thrown off the three internal knots and attained the fruit of stream-enterer, coursing steadily to the Awakened State. There are those who practice the Four Establishments of Mindfulness. There are those who practice the Four Right Efforts, and those who practice the Four Bases of Success. There are those who practice the Five Faculties, those who practice the Five Powers, those who practice the Seven Factors of Awakening, and those who practice the Noble Eightfold Path. There are those who practice loving kindness, those who practice compassion, those who practice joy, and those who practice equanimity. There are those who practice the Nine Contemplations, and those who practice the Observation of Impermanence. There are also bhikkhus who are already practicing Full Awareness of Breathing."

II

"O bhikkhus, the Full Awareness of Breathing, if developed and practiced continuously, will be rewarding and bring great advantages. It will lead to success in practicing the Four Establishments of Mindfulness. If the method of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness is developed and practiced continuously, it will lead to success in the practice of the Seven Factors of Awaking. The Seven Factors of Awakening, if developed and practiced continuously, will give rise to understanding and liberation of the mind.

"What is the way to develop and practice continuously the method of Full Awareness of Breathing so that the practice will be rewarding and offer great benefit?

"It is like this, bhikkhus: the practitioner goes into the forest or to the foot of a tree, or to any deserted place, sits stably in the lotus position, holding his or her body quite straight, and practices like this: 'Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know I am breathing out.'

1. 'Breathing in a long breath, I know I am breathing in a long breath. Breathing out a long breath, I know I am breathing out a long breath.
2. 'Breathing in a short breath, I know I am breathing in a short breath. Breathing out a short breath, I know I am breathing out a short breath.
3. 'Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body. Breathing out, I am aware of my whole body.' He or she practices like this.
4. 'Breathing in, I calm my whole body. Breathing out, I calm my whole body.' He or she practices like this.

5. 'Breathing in, I feel joyful. Breathing out, I feel joyful.' He or she practices like this.
6. 'Breathing in, I feel happy. Breathing out, I feel happy.' He or she practices like this.
7. 'Breathing in, I am aware of my feelings. Breathing out, I am aware of my feelings.' He or she practices like this.
8. 'Breathing in, I calm my feelings. Breathing out, I calm my feelings.' He or she practices like this.
9. 'Breathing in, I am aware of my mind. Breathing out, I am aware of my mind.' He or she practices like this.
10. 'Breathing in, I make my mind happy. Breathing out, I make my mind happy.' He or she practices like this.
11. 'Breathing in, I concentrate my mind. Breathing out, I concentrate my mind.' He or she practices like this.
12. 'Breathing in, I liberate my mind. Breathing out, I liberate my mind.' He or she practices like this.
13. 'Breathing in, I observe the impermanent nature of all dharmas. Breathing out, I observe the impermanent nature of all dharmas.' He or she practices like this.
14. 'Breathing in, I observe the disappearance of desire. Breathing out, I observe the disappearance of desire.' He or she practices like this.
15. 'Breathing in, I observe the no-birth, no-death nature of all phenomena. Breathing out, I observe the no-birth, no-death nature of all phenomena.' He or she practices like this.
16. 'Breathing in, I observe letting go. Breathing out, I observe letting go.' He or she practices like this.

"The Full Awareness of Breathing, if developed and practiced continuously according to these instructions, will be rewarding and of great benefit."

III

"In what way does one develop and continuously practice the Full Awareness of Breathing, in order to succeed in the practice of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness?

"When the practitioner breathes in or out a long or a short breath, aware of his breath or his whole body, or aware that he is making his whole body calm and at peace, he abides peacefully in the observation of the body in the body, persevering, fully awake, clearly understanding his state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life. These exercises of breathing

with Full Awareness belong to the First Establishment of Mindfulness, the body.

"When the practitioner breathes in or out aware of joy or happiness, of the mental formations, or to make the mental formations peaceful, he abides peacefully in the observation of the feelings in the feelings, persevering, fully awake, clearly understanding his state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life. These exercises of breathing with Full Awareness belong to the Second Establishment of Mindfulness, the feelings.

"When the practitioner breathes in or out with the awareness of the mind, or to make the mind happy, to collect the mind in concentration, or to free and liberate the mind, he abides peacefully in the observation of the mind in the mind, persevering, fully awake, clearly understanding his state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life. These exercises of breathing with Full Awareness belong to the Third Establishment of Mindfulness, the mind. Without Full Awareness of Breathing, there can be no development of meditative stability and understanding.

"When the practitioner breathes in or breathes out and contemplates the essential impermanence or the essential disappearance of desire or the no-birth, no-death nature of all phenomena or letting go, he abides peacefully in the observations of the objects of mind in the objects of mind, persevering, fully awake, clearly understanding his state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life. These exercises of breathing with Full Awareness belong to the Fourth Establishment of Mindfulness, the objects of mind.

"The practice of Full Awareness of Breathing, if developed and practiced continuously, will lead to perfect accomplishment of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness."

IV

"Moreover, if they are developed and continuously practiced, the Four Establishments of Mindfulness will lead to perfect abiding in the Seven Factors of Awakening. How is this so?

"When the practitioner abides in the practice of observing the body in the body, the feelings in the feelings, the mind in the mind, and the objects of mind in the objects of mind, diligent, fully awake, clearly understanding her state, gone beyond all attachment and aversion to this life, at that point mindfulness is maintained in her in a sustained and steadfast way and she will attain the First Factor of Awakening, namely mindfulness. She cultivates it and in time it comes to fulfilment.

"When the practitioner abides in mindfulness and he can investigate and examine every object of mind that arises, then the Second Factor of Awakening will be born and developed in him, the factor of investigating dharmas. He cultivates it and in time it comes to fulfilment.

"When the practitioner abides in the observation and examination of every dharma in a sustained, diligent, and steadfast way, the Third Factor of Awakening will be born and developed in her, the factor of energy. She cultivates it and in time it comes to fulfilment.

"When the practitioner abides in the practice of diligence in a sustained and steadfast way, the Fourth Factor of Awakening will be born and developed in him, the factor of joy. He cultivates it and in time it comes to fulfilment..

"When the practitioner can abide in the state of joy, she will feel her body and mind light and at peace. At this point the Fifth Factor of Awakening will be born and developed in her, the factor of ease. She cultivates it and in time it comes to fulfilment.

"When both body and mind are at ease, the practitioner can easily enter into concentration. At this point the Sixth Factor of Awakening will be born and developed in him, the factor of concentration. He cultivates it and in time it comes to fulfilment.

"When the practitioner is truly abiding in concentration she will cease discriminating and comparing. At this point the Seventh Factor of Awakening will be born and developed in her, the factor of equanimity. She cultivates it and in time it comes to fulfilment.

"This is how the Four Establishments of Mindfulness, if developed and practiced continuously, will lead to perfect abiding in the Seven Factors of Awakening."

V

"How will the Seven Factors of Awakening, if developed and practiced continuously, lead to the accomplishment of true understanding and complete liberation?

"The practitioner cultivates the Seven Factors of Awakening, living in quiet seclusion, meditating diligently on the desireless and no-birth, no-death nature of all things in order to perfect the ability of letting go. That is how the cultivation and development of the Seven Factors of Awakening will lead to the accomplishment of true understanding and liberation."

VI

This is what the Lord, the Awakened One, said; and everyone in the assembly felt delight at having heard his teachings

Anapanasati Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 118*

* For commentary, see Thich Nhat Hanh, *Breathe! You Are Alive: Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1995) and *Path of Emancipation* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2000).

Discourse on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness

I

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when he was living at Kammassadhamma, a market town of the Kuru people. The Buddha addressed the bhikkhus, "O bhikkhus."

And the bhikkhus replied, "Venerable Lord."

The Buddha said, "Bhikkhus, there is a most wonderful way to help living beings realize purification, overcome directly grief and sorrow, end pain and anxiety, travel the right path, and realize nirvana. This way is the Four Establishments of Mindfulness.

"What are the Four Establishments?

1. "Bhikkhus, a practitioner remains established in the observation of the body in the body, diligent, with clear understanding, mindful, having abandoned every craving and every distaste for this life.
2. "He remains established in the observation of the feelings in the feelings, diligent, with clear understanding, mindful, having abandoned every craving and every distaste for this life.
3. "He remains established in the observation of the mind in the mind, diligent, with clear understanding, mindful, having abandoned every craving and every distaste for this life.
4. "He remains established in the observation of the objects of mind in the objects of mind, diligent, with clear understanding, mindful, having abandoned every craving and every distaste for this life."

II

"And how does a practitioner remain established in the observation of the body in the body?

"She goes to the forest, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty room, sits down cross-legged in the lotus position, holds her body straight, and establishes mindfulness in front of her. She breathes in, aware that she is breathing in. She breathes out, aware that she is breathing out. When she breathes in a long breath, she knows, 'I am breathing in a long breath.' When she breathes out a long breath, she knows, 'I am breathing out a long breath.' When she breathes in a short breath, she knows, 'I am breathing

in a short breath.' When she breathes out a short breath, she knows, 'I am breathing out a short breath.'

"She uses the following practice: 'Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body. Breathing out, I am aware of my whole body. Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I calm my body.'

"Just as a skilled potter knows when he makes a long turn on the wheel, 'I am making a long turn,' and knows when he makes a short turn, 'I am making a short turn,' so a practitioner, when she breathes in a long breath, knows, 'I am breathing in a long breath,' and when she breathes in a short breath, knows, 'I am breathing in a short breath,' when she breathes out a long breath, knows, 'I am breathing out a long breath,' and when she breathes out a short breath, knows, 'I am breathing out a short breath.'

"She uses the following practice: 'Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body. Breathing out, I am aware of my whole body. Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I calm my body.'

"Moreover, when a practitioner walks, he is aware, 'I am walking.' When he is standing, he is aware, 'I am standing.' When he is sitting, he is aware, 'I am sitting.' When he is lying down, he is aware, 'I am lying down.' In whatever position his body happens to be, he is aware of the position of his body.

"Moreover, when the practitioner is going forward or backward, he applies full awareness to his going forward or backward. When he looks in front or looks behind, bends down or stands up, he also applies full awareness to what he is doing. He applies full awareness to wearing the sanghati robe or carrying the alms bowl. When he eats or drinks, chews, or savors the food, he applies full awareness to all this. When passing excrement or urinating, he applies full awareness to this. When he walks, stands, lies down, sits, sleeps or wakes up, speaks or is silent, he shines his awareness on all this.

"Further, the practitioner meditates on her very own body from the soles of the feet upwards and then from the hair on top of the head downwards, a body contained inside the skin and full of all the impurities which belong to the body: 'Here is the hair of the head, the hairs on the body, the nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, bowels, excrement, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, saliva, mucus, synovial fluid, urine.'

"Bhikkhus, imagine a sack which can be opened at both ends, containing a variety of grains—brown rice, wild rice, mung beans, kidney beans, sesame, white rice. When someone with good eyesight opens the bags, he

will review it like this: 'This is brown rice, this is wild rice, these are mung beans, these are kidney beans, these are sesame seeds, this is white rice.' Just so the practitioner passes in review the whole of his body from the soles of the feet to the hair on the top of the head, a body enclosed in a layer of skin and full of all the impurities which belong to the body: 'Here is the hair of the head, the hairs on the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, bowels, excrement, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, saliva, mucus, synovial fluid, urine.'

"Further, in whichever position her body happens to be, the practitioner passes in review the elements which constitute the body: 'In this body is the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element.'

"As a skilled butcher or an apprentice butcher, having killed a cow, might sit at the crossroads to divide the cow into many parts, the practitioner passes in review the elements which comprise her very own body: 'Here in this body are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element.'

Further, the practitioner compares his own body with a corpse which he visualizes thrown onto a charnel ground and lying there for one, two, or three days—bloated, blue in color, and festering, and he observes, 'This body of mine is of the same nature. It will end up in the same way; there is no way it can avoid that state.'

"Further, the practitioner compares his own body with a corpse which he visualizes thrown onto a charnel ground, pecked at by crows, eaten by hawks, vultures, and jackals, and infested with maggots and worms, and he observes, 'This body of mine is of the same nature, it will end up in the same way, there is no way it can avoid that state.'

"Further, the practitioner compares his own body with a corpse which he visualizes thrown onto a charnel ground; it is just a skeleton with a little flesh and blood sticking to it, and the bones are held together by the ligaments.

"Further, the practitioner compares his own body with a corpse which he visualizes thrown onto a charnel ground; it is just a skeleton, no longer adhered to by any flesh, but still smeared by a little blood, the bones still held together by the ligaments.

"Further, the practitioner compares his own body with a corpse which he visualizes thrown onto a charnel ground; it is just a skeleton, no longer adhered to by any flesh nor smeared by any blood, but the bones are still held together by the ligaments.

"Further, the practitioner compares his own body with a corpse which he visualizes thrown onto a charnel ground; all that is left is a collection of bones scattered here and there; in one place a hand bone, in another a shin bone, a thigh bone, a pelvis, a spinal column, a skull.

"Further, the practitioner compares his own body with a corpse which he visualizes thrown onto a charnel ground; all that is left is a collection of bleached bones, the color of shells.

"Further, the practitioner compares his own body with a corpse which he visualizes thrown onto a charnel ground; it has been lying there for more than one year and all that is left is a collection of dried bones.

"Further, the practitioner compares his own body with a corpse which he visualizes thrown onto a charnel ground; all that is left is the dust which comes from the rotted bones, and he observes, 'This body of mine is of the same nature, it will end up in the same way. There is no way it can avoid that state.'

"This is how the practitioner remains established in the observation of the body in the body, observation of the body from within or from without, or both from within or from without. He remains established in the observation of the process of coming-to-be in the body or the process of dissolution in the body or both in the process of coming-to-be and the process of dissolution. Or he is mindful of the fact, 'There is a body here,' until understanding and full awareness come about. He remains established in the observation, free, not caught in any worldly consideration. That is how to practice observation of the body in the body, O bhikkhus."

III

"Bhikkhus, how does a practitioner remain established in the observation of the feelings in the feelings?

"Whenever the practitioner has a pleasant feeling, she is aware, 'I am experiencing a pleasant feeling.' The practitioner practices like this for all the feelings, whether they are pleasant, painful, or neutral, observing when they belong to the body and when they belong to the mind.

"This is how the practitioner remains established in the observation of the feelings in the feelings, observation of the feelings from within or from without, or observation of the feelings both from within and from without. She remains established in the observation of the process of coming-to-be in the feelings or the process of dissolution in the feelings or both in the process of coming-to-be and the process of dissolution. Or she is mindful of the fact, 'There is feeling here,' until understanding and full awareness

come about. She remains established in the observation, free, not caught in any worldly consideration. That is how to practice observation of the feelings in the feelings, O bhikkhus."

IV

"Bhikkhus, how does a practitioner remain established in the observation of the mind in the mind?

"When his mind is desiring, the practitioner is aware, 'My mind is desiring.' When his mind is not desiring, he is aware, 'My mind is not desiring.' He is aware in the same way concerning a hating mind, a confused mind, a collected mind, a dispersed mind, an expansive mind, a narrow mind, the highest mind, and a concentrated and liberated mind.

"This is how the practitioner remains established in the observation of the mind in the mind, observation of the mind from within or from without, or observation of the mind both from within and from without. He remains established in the observation of the process of coming-to-be in the mind or the process of dissolution in the mind or both in the process of coming-to-be and the process of dissolution. Or he is mindful of the fact, 'There is mind here,' until understanding and full awareness come about. He remains established in the observation, free, not caught in any worldly consideration. This is how to practice observation of the mind in the mind, O bhikkhus."

V

"Bhikkhus, how does a practitioner remain established in the observation of the objects of mind in the objects of mind?

"First of all, she observes the objects of mind in the objects of mind with regard to the Five Hindrances. How does she observe this?

"When sensual desire is present in her, she is aware, 'Sensual desire is present in me.' Or when sensual desire is not present in her, she is aware, 'Sensual desire is not present in me.' When sensual desire begins to arise, she is aware of it. When sensual desire that has already arisen is abandoned, she is aware of it. When sensual desire that has already been abandoned will not arise again in the future, she is aware of it.

"She practices in the same way concerning anger, dullness and drowsiness, agitation and remorse, and doubt.

"Further, the practitioner observes the objects of mind in the objects of mind with regard to the Five Aggregates of Clinging. How does she observe this?

"She observes like this: 'Such is form. Such is the arising of form. Such is the disappearance of form. Such is feeling. Such is the arising of feeling. Such is the disappearance of feeling. Such is perception. Such is the arising of perception. Such is the disappearance of perception. Such are mental formations. Such is the arising of mental formations. Such is the disappearance of mental formations. Such is consciousness. Such is the arising of consciousness. Such is the disappearance of consciousness.

"Further, bhikkhus, the practitioner observes the objects of mind in the objects of mind with regard to the six sense organs and the six sense objects. How does she observe this?

"She is aware of the eyes and aware of the form, and she is aware of the internal formations which are produced in dependence on these two things. She is aware of the birth of a new internal formation and is aware of abandoning an already produced internal formation, and she is aware when an already abandoned internal formation will not arise again.

"She is aware in the same way of the ears and sound, the nose and smell, the tongue and taste, the body and touch, the mind and objects of mind.

"Further, bhikkhus, the practitioner remains established in the observation of the objects of mind in the objects of mind with regard to the Seven Factors of Awakening.

"How does he remain established in the practice of observation of the Seven Factors of Awakening?

"When the factor of awakening, mindfulness, is present in him, he is aware, 'Mindfulness is present in me.' When mindfulness is not present in him, he is aware, 'Mindfulness is not present in me.' He is aware when not-yet-born mindfulness is being born and when already-born mindfulness is perfectly developed.

"In the same way, he is aware of the factors of investigation, diligence, joy, ease, concentration, and equanimity.

"Further, bhikkhus, a practitioner remains established in the observation of objects of mind in the objects of mind with regard to the Four Noble Truths.

"How, bhikkhus, does the practitioner remain established in the observation of the Four Noble Truths?

"A practitioner is aware 'This is suffering,' as it arises. She is aware, 'This is the cause of the suffering,' as it arises. She is aware, 'This is the end of suffering,' as it arises. She is aware, 'This is the path which leads to the end of suffering,' as it arises.

"This is how the practitioner remains established in the observation of

the objects of mind in the objects of mind either from within or from without, or both from within and from without. She remains established in the observation of the process of coming-to-be in any of the objects of mind or the process of dissolution in the objects of mind or both in the process of coming-to-be and the process of dissolution. Or she is mindful of the fact, 'There is an object of mind here,' until understanding and full awareness come about. She remains established in the observation, free, not caught in any worldly consideration. That is how to practice observation of the objects of mind in the objects of mind, O bhikkhus."

VI

"Bhikkhus, he who practices the Four Establishments of Mindfulness for seven years can expect one of two fruits—the highest understanding in this very life or, if there remains some residue of affliction, he can attain the fruit of no-return.

"Let alone seven years, bhikkhus, whoever practices the Four Establishments of Mindfulness for six, five, four, three, two years or one year, for seven, six, five, four, three, or two months, one month or half a month, can also expect one of two fruits—either the highest understanding in this very life or, if there remains some residue of affliction, he can attain the fruit of no-return.

"That is why we said that this path, the path of the four grounds for the establishment of mindfulness, is the most wonderful path, which helps beings realize purification, transcend grief and sorrow, destroy pain and anxiety, travel the right path, and realize nirvana."

The bhikkhus were delighted to hear the teaching of the Buddha. They took it to heart and began to put it into practice.

Satipatthana Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 10*

*For commentary, see Thich Nhat Hanh, *Transformation and Healing: Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness*, Revised Edition (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2006).

Discourse on the Five Ways of Putting an End to Anger

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when he was staying in the Anathapindika Monastery in the Jeta Grove near the town of Shravasti.

One day the Venerable Shariputra said to the monks, "Friends, today I want to share with you five ways of putting an end to anger. Please listen carefully and put into practice what I teach."

The bhikshus agreed and listened carefully.

The Venerable Shariputra then said, "What are these five ways of putting an end to anger?

"This is the first way. My friends, if there is someone whose bodily actions are not kind but whose words are kind, if you feel anger toward that person but you are wise, you will know how to meditate in order to put an end to your anger.

"My friends, say there is a bhikshu practicing asceticism who wears a patchwork robe. One day he is going past a garbage pile filled with excrement, urine, mucus, and many other filthy things, and he sees in the pile one piece of cloth still intact. Using his left hand, he picks up the piece of cloth, and he takes the other end and stretches it out with his right hand. He observes that this piece of cloth is not torn and has not been stained by excrement, urine, sputum, or other kinds of filth. So he folds it and puts it away to take home, wash, and sew into his patchwork robe. My friends, if you are wise, when someone's bodily actions are not kind but his words are kind, you should not pay attention to his unkind bodily actions, but only be attentive to his kind words. This will help you put an end to your anger.

"My friends, this is the second method. If you become angry with someone whose words are not kind but whose bodily actions are kind, if you are wise, you will know how to meditate in order to put an end to your anger.

"My friends, say that not far from the village there is a deep lake, and the surface of that lake is covered with algae and grass. There is someone who comes near that lake who is very thirsty, suffering greatly from the heat. He takes off his clothes, jumps into the water, and using his hands to clear away the algae and grass, enjoys bathing and drinking the cool water of the lake. It is the same, my friends, with someone whose words are not kind but whose bodily actions are kind. Do not pay attention to that person's words.

Only be attentive to his bodily actions in order to be able to put an end to your anger. Someone who is wise should practice in this way.

"Here is the third method, my friends. If there is someone whose bodily actions and words are not kind, but who still has a little kindness in his heart, if you feel anger toward that person and are wise, you will know how to meditate to put an end to your anger.

"My friends, say there is someone going to a crossroads. She is weak, thirsty, poor, hot, deprived, and filled with sorrow. When she arrives at the crossroads, she sees a buffalo's footprint with a little stagnant rainwater in it. She thinks to herself, 'There is very little water in this buffalo's footprint. If I use my hand or a leaf to scoop it up, I will stir it up and it will become muddy and undrinkable. Therefore, I will have to kneel down with my arms and knees on the earth, put my lips right to the water, and drink it directly.' Straightaway, she does just that. My friends, when you see someone whose bodily actions and words are not kind, but where there is still a little kindness in her heart, do not pay attention to her actions and words, but to the little kindness that is in her heart so that you may put an end to your anger. Someone who is wise should practice in that way.

"This is the fourth method, my friends. If there is someone whose words and bodily actions are not kind, and in whose heart there is nothing that can be called kindness, if you are angry with that person and you are wise, you will know how to meditate in order to put an end to your anger.

"My friends, suppose there is someone on a long journey who falls sick. He is alone, completely exhausted, and not near any village. He falls into despair, knowing that he will die before completing his journey. If at that point, someone comes along and sees this man's situation, she immediately takes the man's hand and leads him to the next village, where she takes care of him, treats his illness, and makes sure he has everything he needs by way of clothes, medicine, and food. Because of this compassion and loving kindness, the man's life is saved. Just so, my friends, when you see someone whose words and bodily actions are not kind, and in whose heart there is nothing that can be called kindness, give rise to this thought: 'Someone whose words and bodily actions are not kind and in whose heart is nothing that can be called kindness, is someone who is undergoing great suffering. Unless he meets a good spiritual friend, there will be no chance for him to transform and go to realms of happiness.' Thinking like this, you will be able to open your heart with love and compassion toward that person. You will be able to put an end to your anger and help that person. Someone who is wise should practice like this.

"My friends, this is the fifth method. If there is someone whose bodily actions are kind, whose words are kind, and whose mind is also kind, if you are angry with that person and you are wise, you will know how to meditate in order to put an end to your anger.

"My friends, suppose that not far from the village there is a very beautiful lake. The water in the lake is clear and sweet, the bed of the lake is even, the banks of the lake are lush with green grass, and all around the lake, beautiful fresh trees give shade. Someone who is thirsty, suffering from heat, whose body is covered in sweat, comes to the lake, takes off his clothes, leaves them on the shore, jumps down into the water, and finds great comfort and enjoyment in drinking and bathing in the pure water. His heat, thirst, and suffering disappear immediately. In the same way, my friends, when you see someone whose bodily actions are kind, whose words are kind, and whose mind is also kind, give your attention to all his kindness of body, speech, and mind, and do not allow anger or jealousy to overwhelm you. If you do not know how to live happily with someone who is as fresh as that, you cannot be called someone who has wisdom.

"My dear friends, I have shared with you the five ways of putting an end to anger."

When the bhikshus heard the Venerable Shariputra's words, they were happy to receive them and put them into practice.

Madhyama Agama 25
(Corresponds with Aghata Vinaya Sutta
[Discourse on Water as an Example], Anguttara Nikaya 5.162)

Discourse on the White-Clad Disciple

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when he was staying at the monastery in the Jeta Grove near Shravasti that had been donated by the layman Anathapindika. On that day, Anathapindika came with five hundred other lay students of the Buddha to the hut where Shariputra resided. They bowed their heads in reverence to Shariputra and sat down respectfully to one side. Venerable Shariputra offered them skillful teachings, bringing them joy and confidence in the Three Jewels and the practice of the true Dharma. Then, Shariputra and the five hundred laymen and women went together to the hut of the Buddha, where Shariputra, Anathapindika, and the other five hundred laymen and women prostrated at the Buddha's feet and sat down to one side.

When he observed that everyone was seated, the Buddha addressed Shariputra, saying, "Shariputra, if lay students of the Buddha, those who wear white robes, study and practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings and the Four Contemplations, they will realize without hardship the capacity to abide happily in the present moment. They know they will not fall into the realms of hell, hungry ghosts, animals, and other suffering paths.

"Such men and women will have attained the fruit of stream-enterer, and they will have no fear of descending into dark paths. They are on the way of right awakening. They will only need to return to the worlds of gods or men seven more times before attaining perfect liberation and the end of suffering.

"Shariputra, how do lay students of the Buddha, those who wear white robes, study and practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings and the Four Contemplations?

"Lay students of the Buddha refrain from killing, put an end to killing, rid themselves of all weapons, learn humility before others, learn humility in themselves, practice love and compassion, and protect all living beings, even the smallest insects. They uproot from within themselves any intention to kill. In this way, lay students of the Buddha study and practice the first of the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

"Lay students of the Buddha refrain from taking what has not been given, put an end to taking what has not been given. They find joy in being generous without expecting anything in return. Their minds are not obscured by greed or craving. They constantly guard their own honesty and

uproot from within themselves any intention to take what has not been given. In this way, lay students of the Buddha study and practice the second of the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

"Lay students of the Buddha refrain from sexual misconduct, put an end to sexual misconduct, and protect everyone—those under the care of their father, mother, or both father and mother; their elder sister or elder brother; their parents-in-law or other in-laws; those of the same sex; the wife, daughter, husband or son of another; and those who have been raped, assaulted, or sexually abused, or who have been prostitutes. Lay students of the Buddha uproot from within themselves any intention to commit sexual misconduct. In this way, lay students of the Buddha study and practice the third of the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

"Lay students of the Buddha refrain from saying what is not true, put an end to saying what is not true. They say only what is true, and they find great joy in saying what is true. They always abide in truth and are completely reliable, never deceiving others. They have uprooted from within themselves any intention to say what is not true. In this way, lay students of the Buddha study and practice the fourth of the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

"Lay students of the Buddha refrain from drinking alcohol, put an end to drinking alcohol. They uproot from within themselves the habit of drinking alcohol. In this way, lay students of the Buddha study and practice the fifth of the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

"Shariputra, how do lay students of the Buddha attain the Four Contemplations and abide happily in the present moment with ease and without hardship? They practice being aware of the Buddha, meditating on the one who has come from Suchness and returns to Suchness; as one who is truly and fully awakened, without any attachments; as one whose understanding and practice are perfect; as the Well-Gone One; as one who knows and fully understands the world; as one who has attained the very highest; as one who has tamed what needs to be tamed; as a teacher of humans and gods; as an Awakened One; and as a World-Honored One. When they meditate in this way, all unwholesome desires come to an end, and impure, sorrowful, or anxious elements no longer arise in their hearts. As a result of contemplating the Buddha, their thoughts are clear, they feel joy, and they arrive at the first of the Four Contemplations, abiding happily in the present moment, with ease and without any hardships.

"Shariputra, the lay students of the Buddha practice being aware of the Dharma, meditating as follows: the Dharma is taught by the Lord Buddha with great skill; it can lead to complete liberation; it can lead to a state of

no afflictions; it is cool and refreshing; its value is timeless. When lay students of the Buddha meditate on and observe the Dharma in this way, all unwholesome desires come to an end, and impure, sorrowful, or anxious elements no longer arise in their hearts. As a result of contemplating the Dharma, their thoughts are clear, they feel joy, and they arrive at the second of the Four Contemplations, abiding happily in the present moment, with ease and without any hardship.

"Shariputra, the lay students of the Buddha practice being aware of the Sangha, meditating as follows: the noble community of the Tathagata is advancing in a good direction; it is on an upright path; it is oriented toward the Dharma; it lives the teachings in the way they are meant to be lived. In that community, there are the Four Pairs and the Eight Grades—realized arhats and those who are realizing the fruit of arhatship, non-returners and those who are realizing the fruit of non-returning, once-returners and those who are realizing the fruit of once-returning, and stream-enterers and those who are realizing the fruit of stream-entry. The noble community of the Tathagata has successfully realized the practice of the mindfulness trainings *(shila)*, the practice of concentration *(samadhi)*, and the practice of insight *(prajña)*. It has liberation and liberated vision. It is worthy of respect, honor, service, and offerings. It is a beautiful field of merit for everyone. As a result of contemplating the Sangha, their thoughts are clear, they feel joy, and they arrive at the third of the Four Contemplations, abiding happily in the present moment, with ease and without any hardship.

"Shariputra, the lay students of the Buddha practice being mindful of the mindfulness trainings, meditating as follows: the mindfulness trainings have no drawbacks, flaws, impurities, or unsound points; and they help us abide in the land of the Tathagata. The Mindfulness Trainings are not of the nature to deceive. They are always praised, accepted, practiced, and guarded by the holy ones. As a result of contemplating these Trainings, the students' thoughts are clear, they feel joy, and they arrive at the fourth of the Four Contemplations, abiding happily in the present moment, with ease and without any hardship.

"Shariputra, remember that white-clad disciples of the Buddha who practice in this way will not descend into hell realms, hungry ghost realms, animal realms, or any other realms of suffering. They have experienced the fruit of stream-entry, which means not falling into paths of hardship or wrongdoing. Having entered the stream, they cannot help but go in the direction of right awakening. They will only need to return to the world of

gods or humans seven more times before they arrive at complete liberation and the end of sorrow."

Thus spoke the Buddha. The Venerable Shariputra, the other monks and nuns, the layman Anathapindika, and the other five hundred laymen and laywomen heard these words and were delighted to put them into practice.

Upasaka Sutra, Madhyama Agama 128*

* For commentary, see Thich Nhat Hanh, *For a Future to Be Possible* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1998).

Discourse on Measuring and Reflecting

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when he was staying with the Bhagga people in Sumsumaragiri, in the Deer Park in the Bhesakala Grove. The Venerable Mahamoggallana addressed the bhikkhus, "My friends."

"Yes, friend," they replied to the Venerable Mahamoggallana.

The Venerable Mahamoggallana spoke as follows:

"My friends, suppose there is a bhikkhu who says to the other bhikkhus: 'Please talk to me, Reverend Bhikkhus. I want you to offer me guidance.' If he is difficult to talk to, endowed with qualities that make him difficult to deal with, impatient, intolerant, not good at accepting constructive criticism or the words of advice and instruction from friends in the practice, then those who practice the path of sublime conduct with him will think, 'He is not one to be spoken to, he is not one to be instructed, he is not someone to have confidence in.' What are the qualities that make someone difficult to approach?

"My friends, a bhikkhu who is attached to wrong desires and is controlled by wrong desires is difficult to approach and talk to.

"These are other reasons that make it difficult to approach and talk to him: a person praises himself and despises others; he is easily angered and mastered by his anger; because he is angry, he bears a grudge; because he is angry, he is bad-tempered; because he is angry, he speaks in a bad-tempered way; he accuses one who has corrected him; he disparages one who has corrected him; he corrects in turn one who has corrected him; he evades the criticism by asking another question; he changes the subject; he manifests ill-temper, anger, and sulkiness; he does not succeed in explaining his behavior when corrected; he is unmindful and ill-willed; he is jealous and greedy; he is hypocritical and deceitful; he is stubborn and arrogant; or he is worldly and clings to things that belong to this world and finds it difficult to let go. These, my friends, are the habit energies that make it difficult to approach and talk to him.

"My friends, suppose there is a bhikkhu who requests of other bhikkhus: 'Please talk to me, Reverend Bhikkhus. I want you to offer me guidance.' If he is easy to talk to, endowed with qualities that make him easy to deal with, patient, tolerant, open and able to accept constructive criticism or words of advice and instruction from friends in the practice, then those who practice the path of sublime conduct with him will think, 'He is someone

we can talk to, someone we can instruct, someone we can have confidence in.' What are the qualities that make someone easy to approach?

"My friends, a bhikkhu who is not caught in wrong desires and is not controlled by wrong desires is easy to approach and talk to. He does not praise himself and despise others; he is not easily angered or mastered by his anger; because he is not angry, he does not bear a grudge; because he is not angry, he is not bad-tempered; because he is not angry, he does not speak in a bad-tempered way; he does not accuse one who has corrected him; he does not disparage one who has corrected him; he does not correct in turn one who has corrected him; he does not evade the criticism by asking another question; he does not change the subject; he does not manifest ill-temper, anger, and sulkiness; he succeeds in explaining his behavior when corrected; he is not jealous and greedy; he is not hypocritical and deceitful; he is not stubborn and arrogant; he is not worldly nor does he cling to things that belong to this world and he does not find it difficult to let go. These, my friends, are the qualities that make it easy to approach and talk to him.

"My friends, one should infer one's own state by considering the state of others in the following way: 'That person has wrong desires and is controlled by his wrong desires; therefore, I do not find him easy to approach. If I had wrong desires and were controlled by those wrong desires, others would not find me easy to approach.' When one sees this clearly, one should make the following determination: 'May I not be attached to wrong desires or be controlled by those wrong desires.'

"This method of reflection needs to be practiced in other cases, such as praising oneself and despising others, being easily angered and mastered by anger, and so on.

"My friends, this is how a bhikkhu should reflect on himself: 'At this moment, am I attached to wrong desires and controlled by wrong desires?' If when a bhikkhu reflects in this way, he knows, 'At this moment, I am attached to wrong desires and controlled by wrong desires,' then he should practice diligently to put an end to these unwholesome mental formations. If, on the other hand, when he reflects, he knows, 'At this moment, I am not attached to wrong desires and not controlled by wrong desires,' then a bhikkhu should live with a feeling of happiness, and he should practice diligently to nourish and increase these wholesome mental formations.

"This method of reflection needs to be practiced in other cases, such as praising oneself and despising others, becoming easily angered and mastered by anger, and so on.

"If, my friends, when he reflects, a bhikkhu sees clearly that he has not yet given up all these unbeneficial qualities, then he should practice diligently to give them all up. If, when he reflects, a bhikkhu sees clearly that he has given up all these unwholesome mental formations, then he should live with a feeling of happiness, and he should practice diligently to nourish and increase these wholesome mental formations.

"It is like when a young person who is fond of adorning himself contemplates his face in the mirror or a bowl of clear water. If he sees dirt or a blemish on his face, he tries to clean it. If he does not see dirt or a blemish, he thinks to himself, 'It is good, my face is clean.'

"So, my friends, if a bhikkhu reflects and sees that all these unwholesome mental formations have not yet been given up, then he practices diligently to give them all up. If he sees that he has given them all up, he feels happy about this and knows that he needs to practice diligently in order to nourish and increase these wholesome mental formations."

The Venerable Mahamoggallana had spoken. The Bhikkhus were delighted, and they accepted their teacher's words with full confidence."

Anumana Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 15

Discourse on the Teachings to Be Given to the Sick

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when the Lord was staying in the monastery in the Jeta Grove in Anathapindika's park, near Shravasti. At that time the householder Anathapindika was seriously ill. When the Venerable Shariputra was told this, he immediately went to Ananda and said, "Brother Ananda, let us go and visit the layman Anathapindika." The Venerable Ananda replied, "Yes, let us go now."

The Venerable Ananda put on his robe, took his bowl, and went into the town of Shravasti with the Venerable Shariputra to make the alms-round. Ananda walked behind Shariputra, stopping at every house until they came to the house of the layman Anathapindika, and they went in to visit him. After he had sat down, the Venerable Shariputra asked the layman Anathapindika, "How is your illness? Is it getting better or worse? Is the physical pain easing at all or is it getting greater?" The householder Anathapindika replied, "Venerable monks, it does not seem to be getting better. The pain is not easing. It is getting greater all the time." Shariputra said, "Friend Anathapindika, now is the time to practice the meditation on the Three Jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

"The Buddha has gone to Suchness, is fully and truly awakened, has perfected understanding and action, has arrived at true happiness, understands the nature of the world, is unequaled in understanding, has conquered the afflictions of human beings, is a teacher of gods and humans, and is the Awakened One, the one who liberates the world.

"The Dharma is the teaching of love and understanding that the Tathagata has expounded. It is deep and lovely, worthy of the highest respect, and very precious. It is a teaching that cannot be compared to ordinary teachings. It is a path of practice for the Noble Ones.

"The Sangha is the community of practice, guided by the teachings of the Awakened One. The community is in harmony, and within it all aspects of the practice can be realized. The community is respected and precious. It practices the precepts and realizes concentration, insight, and liberation. Offerings made to the Sangha are very beneficial.

"Friend Anathapindika, if you meditate in this way on the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, the beneficial effects are beyond measure. Meditating in this way, you can destroy the obstacles of wrong deeds and the

afflictions. You can harvest a fruit that is as fresh and sweet as the balm of compassion. A woman or a man practicing an upright way of life who knows how to meditate on the Three Jewels will have no chance of falling into the three lower realms but will be reborn as a human or a god.

"Friend Anathapindika, now is the time to practice the meditation on the Six Sense Bases:

"These eyes are not me. I am not caught in these eyes.
"These ears are not me. I am not caught in these ears.
"This nose is not me. I am not caught in this nose.
"This tongue is not me. I am not caught in this tongue.
"This body is not me. I am not caught in this body.
"This mind is not me. I am not caught in this mind.

"Now continue your meditation with the Six Sense Objects:

"These forms are not me. I am not caught in these forms.
"These sounds are not me. I am not caught in these sounds.
"These smells are not me. I am not caught in these smells.
"These tastes are not me. I am not caught in these tastes.
"These contacts with the body are not me. I am not caught in these contacts with the body.
"These thoughts are not me. I am not caught in these thoughts.

"Now continue your meditation on the Six Sense Consciousnesses:

"Sight is not me. I am not caught in sight.
"Hearing is not me. I am not caught in hearing.
"Consciousness based on the nose is not me. I am not caught in the consciousness based on the nose.
"Consciousness based on the tongue is not me. I am not caught in consciousness based on the tongue.
"Consciousness based on the body is not me. I am not caught in consciousness based on the body.
"Consciousness based on the mind is not me. I am not caught in consciousness based on the mind.

"Now continue your meditation on the Six Elements:

"The earth element is not me. I am not caught in the earth element.
"The water element is not me. I am not caught in the water element.
"The fire element is not me. I am not caught in the fire element.
"The air element is not me. I am not caught in the air element.
"The space element is not me. I am not caught in the space element.
"The consciousness element is not me. I am not caught in the consciousness element.

"Now continue your meditation on the Five Aggregates:

"Form is not me. I am not limited by the form aggregate.
"Feelings are not me. I am not limited by the feeling aggregate.
"Perceptions are not me. I am not limited by the perception aggregate.
"Mental formations are not me. I am not limited by the mental formation aggregate.
"Consciousness is not me. I am not limited by the consciousness aggregate.

"Now continue your meditation on the Three Times:

"The past is not me. I am not limited by the past.
"The present is not me. I am not limited by the present.
"The future is not me. I am not limited by the future.

"Friend Anathapindika, everything that arises is due to causes and conditions. Everything that is has the nature not to be born and not to die, not to arrive and not to depart. When eyes arise, they arise, but they do not come from anywhere. When eyes cease to be, they cease to be, but they do not go anywhere. Eyes are neither nonexistent before they arise, nor are they existent after they arise. Everything that is comes to be because of a combination of causes and conditions. When the causes and conditions are sufficient, eyes are present. When the causes and conditions are not sufficient, eyes are absent. The same is true of ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind; form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thought; sight, hearing, and the consciousnesses based on the nose, tongue, body, and mind; the Six Elements, the Five Aggregates, and the Three Times.

"In the Five Aggregates, there is nothing that we can call 'I,' a 'person,' or a 'soul.' Ignorance is the inability to see this truth. Because there is ignorance, there are mistaken impulses. Because there are mistaken impulses,

there is mistaken consciousness. Because there is mistaken consciousness, there is the distinction between the perceiver and the perceived. Because there is the distinction between the perceiver and the perceived, there is the distinction between the six organs and the six objects of sense. Because there is the distinction between the six organs and the six objects of sense, there is contact. Because there is contact, there is feeling. Because there is feeling, there is thirst. Because there is thirst, there is grasping. Because there is grasping, there is being. Because there is becoming, there are birth, death, and the subsequent pain and grief.

"Friend Anathapindika, you have meditated that everything that arises is due to causes and conditions and does not have a separate self. That is called 'the meditation on emptiness.' It is the highest and the most profound meditation."

When he had practiced to this point, the layman Anathapindika began to cry. Venerable Ananda asked him, "Friend, why are you crying? Has your meditation not been successful? Do you have some regret?" The layman Anathapindika replied, "Venerable Ananda, I do not regret anything. The meditation has been most successful. I am crying because I am so deeply moved. I have been fortunate to have been able to serve the Buddha and his community for many years, yet I have never heard a teaching so wonderful and precious as the teaching transmitted by the Venerable Shariputra today."

Then the Venerable Ananda said to the layman Anathapindika, "Do you not know, friend, that the Buddha often gives this teaching to bhikshus and bhikshunis?" The layman Anathapindika replied, "Venerable Ananda, please tell the Buddha that there are also laypeople with the capacity to listen, understand, and put into practice these deep and wonderful teachings."

After hearing Shariputra's instructions and meditating accordingly, Anathapindika felt free and at ease. The Venerables Shariputra and Ananda bade him farewell and went back to the monastery, and Anathapindika passed away and was born in the thirty-third heaven.

Ekottara Agama 51. 8
(In consultation with Majjhima Nikaya 143
and Madhyama Agama 26)

Discourse on Taking Refuge in Oneself

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when the Lord was staying in the Mango Grove in the cool shade of the mango trees along the bank of a river in the land of Magadha. The elders Shariputra and Maudgalyayana had recently passed away. It was the full-moon day of the Uposatha Ceremony and the precepts were recited.

The Buddha spread out his sitting mat and sat facing the community. After looking out at those gathered, he said, "As I look at our community, I see a large space left by the Venerables Shariputra and Maudgalyayana. In our Sangha, these venerables were the monks who were the most eloquent in giving Dharma talks, encouraging and instructing all the other monks, nuns, and laypeople.

"O monks, people seek two kinds of riches—material riches and the riches of the Dharma. In their search for material riches, they can go to worldly people. In their search for the riches of the Dharma, they could always go to the Venerables Shariputra and Maudgalyayana. The Tathagata is someone who is not searching for anything, whether it is material or the Dharma.

"O monks, do not be sad or anxious because Shariputra and Maudgalyayana have passed into nirvana. On large trees, filled with leaves, sumptuous fruits and flowers, the largest branches also have to break. On jeweled mountains, do not the highest peaks also have to erode. In the Sangha of the Tathagata, the Venerables Shariputra and Maudgalyayana were the greatest students. So it is natural that these venerables would enter nirvana first. Do not give rise to feelings of sorrow or anguish.

"All phenomena that are born, exist, and are subject to the influence of other phenomena, in other words, all phenomena that are composite, must abide by the law of impermanence and eventually cease to exist. They cannot exist eternally, without someday being destroyed. Everything we cherish and hold dear today, we will have to let go of and be separated from in the future. In not too long a time, I will also pass away. Therefore, I urge you to practice being an island unto yourself, knowing how to take refuge in yourself, and not taking refuge in anyone or anything else.

"Practice taking refuge in the island of the Dharma. Know how to take refuge in the Dharma, and do not take refuge in any other island or person. Meditate on the body in the body, nourishing Right Understanding and

mindfulness to master and transform your cravings and anxieties. Observe the elements outside the body in the elements outside the body, nourishing Right Understanding and mindfulness to master and transform your cravings and anxieties. That is the way to take refuge in the island of self, to return to yourself in order to take refuge in the Dharma, and not to take refuge in any other island or thing."

When the bhikshus heard the Buddha offer this teaching, they were all very happy to put it into practice.

Samyukta Agama 639
In consultaion with Taisho Revised Tripitaka 99

Discourse on Knowing the Better Way to Catch a Snake

I heard these words one time when the Buddha was staying at the Anathapindika Monastery in the Jeta Grove, near Shravasti. At that time, the Bhikshu Arittha, who before being ordained had been a vulture trainer, had the wrong view that according to the teachings of the Buddha, sense pleasures are not an obstacle to the practice. After hearing this, many bhikshus went to Arittha and asked, "Brother Arittha, do you really believe that the Buddha teaches that sense pleasures are not an obstacle to the practice?"

Arittha replied, "Yes, friends, it is true that I believe the Buddha does not regard sense pleasures as an obstacle to the practice."

The bhikshus scolded him, "Brother Arittha, you misrepresent the Buddha's teachings and even slander him. The Lord has never said that sense pleasures are not an obstacle to the practice. In fact, he uses many examples to teach that sense pleasures are an obstacle to the practice. You should abandon your wrong view." Although the bhikshus counseled Arittha in this way, he was not moved to change his view. Three times they asked him to abandon his wrong view, and three times he refused, continuing to say that he was right and the others were wrong.

Having advised him like this to no effect, they stood up and left. They went to the Buddha and recounted all that they had seen and heard.

The Buddha summoned Arittha, admonished him, and taught all of the bhikshus, "Monks, it is important to understand my teachings thoroughly before you teach or put them into practice. If you have not understood the meaning of any teaching I give, please ask me or one of the elder brothers in the Dharma or one of the others who is excellent in the practice about it. There are always some people who do not understand the letter or the spirit of a teaching and, in fact, take it the opposite way of what was intended, whether the teachings are offered in the form of verse or prose, predictions, verse summaries, interdependent origination, similes, spontaneous utterances, quotations, stories of previous births, wonderful occurrences, detailed commentaries, or clarifications with definitions. There are always some people who study only to satisfy their curiosity or win arguments, and not for the sake of liberation. With such a motivation, they miss the true spirit of the teaching. They may go through much hardship, endure difficulties that are not of much benefit, and eventually exhaust themselves.

"Bhikshus, a person who studies that way can be compared to a man trying to catch a poisonous snake in the wild. If he reaches out his hand, the snake may bite his hand, leg, or some other part of his body. Trying to catch a snake that way has no advantages and can only create suffering.

"Bhikshus, understanding my teaching in the wrong way is the same. If you do not practice the Dharma correctly, you may come to understand it as the opposite of what was intended. But if you practice intelligently, you will understand both the letter and the spirit of the teachings and will be able to explain them correctly. Do not practice just to show off or argue with others. Practice to attain liberation, and if you do, you will have little pain or exhaustion.

"Bhikshus, an intelligent student of the Dharma is like a man who uses a forked stick to catch a snake. When he sees a poisonous snake in the wild, he places the stick right below the head of the snake and grabs the snake's neck with his hand. Even if the snake winds itself around the man's hand, leg, or another part of his body, it will not bite him. This is the better way to catch a snake, and it will not lead to pain or exhaustion.

"Bhikshus, a son or daughter of good family who studies the Dharma needs to apply the utmost skill to understanding the letter and the spirit of the teachings. He or she should not study with the aim of boasting, debating, or arguing, but only to attain liberation. Studying in this way, with intelligence, he or she will have little pain or exhaustion.

"Bhikshus, I have told you many times the importance of knowing when it is time to let go of a raft and not hold onto it unnecessarily. When a mountain stream overflows and becomes a torrent of floodwater carrying debris, a man or woman who wants to get across might think, 'What is the safest way to cross this floodwater?' Assessing the situation, she may decide to gather branches and grasses, construct a raft, and use it to cross to the other side. But, after arriving on the other side, she thinks, 'I spent a lot of time and energy building this raft. It is a prized possession, and I will carry it with me as I continue my journey.' If she puts it on her shoulders or head and carries it with her on land, bhikshus, do you think that would be intelligent?"

The bhikshus replied, "No, World-Honored One."

The Buddha said, "How could she have acted more wisely? She could have thought, 'This raft helped me get across the water safely. Now I will leave it at the water's edge for someone else to use in the same way.' Wouldn't that be a more intelligent thing to do?"

The bhikshus replied, "Yes, World-Honored One."

The Buddha taught, "I have given this teaching on the raft many times to remind you how necessary it is to let go of all the true teachings, not to mention teachings that are not true."

"Bhikshus, there are six bases for views. This means that there are six grounds of wrong perception that we need to drop. What are the six?

"First, there is form. Whether belonging to the past, the future, or the present, whether it is our own form or the form of someone else, whether subtle or gross, ugly or beautiful, near or far, such form is not mine, is not me, is not the self. Bhikshus, please look deeply so that you can see the truth concerning form.

"Second, there are feelings.

"Third, there are perceptions.

"Fourth, there are mental formations. Whether these phenomena belong to the past, the future, or the present, whether they are our own or someone else's, whether they are subtle or gross, ugly or beautiful, near or far, such phenomena are not mine, are not me, are not the self.

"Fifth, there is consciousness. Whatever we see, hear, perceive, know, mentally grasp, observe, or think about at the present time or any other time is not ours, is not us, is not the self.

"Sixth, there is the world. Some people think, 'The world is the self. The self is the world. The world is me. I will continue to exist without changing even after I die. I am eternal. I will never disappear.' Please meditate so you can see that the world is not mine, is not me, is not the self. Please look deeply so you can see the truth concerning the world."

Upon hearing this, one bhikshu stood up, bared his right shoulder, joined his palms respectfully, and asked the Buddha, "World-Honored One, can fear and anxiety arise from an internal source?"

The Buddha replied, "Yes, fear and anxiety can arise from an internal source. If you think, 'Things that did not exist in the past have come to exist, but now no longer exist,' you will feel sad or become confused and despairing. This is how fear and anxiety can arise from an internal source."

The same bhikshu then asked, "World-Honored One, can fear and anxiety from an internal source be prevented from arising?"

The Buddha replied, "Fear and anxiety from an internal source can be prevented from arising. If you do not think, 'Things that did not exist in

the past have come to exist, but now no longer exist,' you will not feel sad or become confused and despairing. This is how fear and anxiety from an internal source can be prevented from arising."

"World-Honored One, can fear and anxiety arise from an external source?"

The Buddha taught, "Fear and anxiety can arise from an external source. You may think, 'This is a self. This is the world. This is myself. I will exist forever.' Then if you meet the Buddha or a disciple of the Buddha who has the understanding and intelligence to teach you how to let go of all views of attachment to the body, the self, and the objects of the self with a view to giving up pride, internal knots (*samyojana*), and energy leaks, and you think, 'This is the end of the world. I have to give up everything. I am not the world. I am not me. I am not the self. I will not exist forever. When I die, I will be completely annihilated. There is nothing to look forward to, to be joyful about, or to remember,' you will feel sad and become confused and despairing. This is how fear and anxiety can arise from an external source."

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The Buddha asked, "Bhikshus, do you think the Five Aggregates and the self are permanent, changeless, and not subject to destruction?"

"No, reverend teacher."

"Is there anything you can hold onto with attachment that will not cause anxiety, exhaustion, sorrow, suffering, and despair?"

"No, reverend teacher."

"Is there any view of self in which you can take refuge that will not cause anxiety, exhaustion, sorrow, suffering, and despair?"

"No, reverend teacher."

"Bhikshus, you are quite correct. Whenever there is an idea of self, there is also an idea of what belongs to the self. When there is no idea of self, there is no idea of anything that belongs to the self. Self and what belongs to the self are two views that are based on trying to grasp things that cannot be grasped and to establish things that cannot be established." Such wrong perceptions cause us to be bound by internal knots that arise the moment we are caught by ideas that cannot be grasped or established and have no basis in reality. Do you see that these are wrong perceptions? Do you see the consequences of such wrong perceptions in the case of Bhikshu Arittha?"

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The Buddha continued, "If, when he considers the six bases for wrong views, a bhikshu does not give rise to the idea of 'I' or 'mine,' he is not

caught in the chains of this life. Since he is not caught in the chains of this life, he has no fear. To have no fear is to arrive at nirvana. Such a person is no longer troubled by birth and death; the holy life has been lived; what needs to be done has been done; there will be no further births or deaths; and the truth of things as they are is known. Such a bhikshu has filled in the moat, crossed the moat, destroyed the enemy citadel, unbolted the door, and is able to look directly into the mirror of highest understanding.

"Bhikshus, that is the Way of the Tathagata and those who have attained liberation. Indra, Prajapati, Brahma, and the other gods in their entourage, however hard they look, cannot find any trace or basis for the consciousness of a Tathagata. The Tathagata is a noble fount of freshness and coolness. There is no great heat and no sorrow in this state. When recluses and brahmans hear me say this, they may slander me, saying that I do not speak the truth, that the monk Gautama proposes a theory of nihilism and teaches absolute nonexistence, while in fact living beings do exist. Bhikshus, the Tathagata has never taught the things they say. In truth, the Tathagata teaches only the ending of suffering in order to attain the state of non-fear. If the Tathagata is blamed, criticized, defamed, or beaten, he does not care. He does not become angry, walk away in hatred, or do anything in revenge. If someone blames, criticizes, defames, or beats the Tathagata, how does he react? The Tathagata thinks, 'If someone respects, honors, or makes offerings to a Tathagata, the Tathagata would not on that account feel pleased. He would think only that someone is doing this because the Tathagata has attained the fruit of awakening and transformation.' "

Having heard the Buddha speak thus, the bhikshus, with great joy, put the teachings into practice.

Arittha Sutra, Madhyama Agama 220
Alagaddupama Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 22*

* For the complete text and commentary, see Thich Nhat Hanh, *Thundering Silence: Sutra on Knowing the Better Way to Catch a Snake* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1993).

Discourse on Youth and Happiness

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when the Lord was staying at the Bamboo Forest Monastery near the town of Rajagriha. At that time there was a bhikshu who, in the very early morning, came to the banks of the river, took off his upper robe and left it on the bank, and went down to the river to bathe. After bathing, he came out of the river, waited until his body was dry, and then put on his upper robe. At that time a goddess appeared, whose body, surrounded by light, lit up the entire bank of the river. The goddess said to the bhikshu, "Venerable, you've recently become a monk. Your hair is still black; you are very young. At this time in your life, shouldn't you be perfumed with oils, adorned with gems and fragrant flowers, enjoying the five kinds of sensual desire? Why have you abandoned your loved ones and turned your back on the worldly life, living alone? You've shaved your hair and beard, donned the monk's robe, and placed your faith in monastic practice. Why have you abandoned the pleasures of this moment to seek pleasures in a distant future?"

The bhikshu replied, "I have not abandoned the present moment in order to seek pleasures in a distant future. I have abandoned pleasures that are untimely for the deepest happiness of this moment."

The goddess asked, "What do you mean?"

And the bhikshu replied, "The World-Honored One has taught: in the joy associated with sensual desire there is little sweetness and much bitterness, tiny benefits, and a great potential to lead to disaster. Now, as I dwell in the Dharma that is available here and now, I've given up the burning fire of afflictions. The Dharma is available here and now. It is outside of time, and it always invites us to come and see it. It is to be realized and experienced by each of us for ourselves. That is what is meant by abandoning untimely pleasures in order to arrive at the deepest happiness of the present moment."

The goddess asked the bhikshu again, "Why does the World-Honored One say that in the untimely pleasure of sensual desire there is little sweetness and much bitterness, its benefit is tiny but its potential to lead to disaster is great? Why does he say that if we dwell in the Dharma that is available here and now we are able to give up the flames of the afflictions that burn us? Why does he say that this Dharma belongs to the present

moment, is outside of time, always invites us to come and see it, is available here and now, and is realized and experienced by each of us for ourselves?"

The bhikshu replied, "I have only been ordained for two years. I do not have the skill to explain to you the true teachings and the wonderful precepts that the World-Honored One has proclaimed. The World-Honored One is presently nearby, in the Bamboo Forest. Why don't you go to him and ask your questions directly? The Tathagata will offer you the Right Dharma, and you will be able to receive and practice his guidance as you see fit."

The goddess replied, "Venerable bhikshu, at this moment the Tathagata is surrounded by powerful and influential gods and goddesses. It would be difficult for me to have the chance to approach him and ask about the Dharma. If you would be willing to ask the Tathagata these questions on my behalf, I will accompany you."

The bhikshu replied, "I will help you."

The goddess said, "Venerable, then I will follow you."

The bhikshu went to the place where the Buddha was staying, bowed his head and prostrated before the Buddha, then withdrew a little and sat down to one side. He repeated the conversation he had just had with the goddess, and then said, "World-Honored One, if this goddess had not spoken sincerely, she would not have come here with me." At that moment, there was a sound from afar, "Venerable monk, I am here. I am here."

The World-Honored One immediately offered this gatha:

> "Beings produce wrong perceptions
> concerning objects of desire.
> That is why they are caught in desire.
> Because they do not know what desire really is,
> they proceed on the path to Death."

The Buddha then asked the goddess, "Do you understand this gatha? If not, please say so."

The goddess addressed the Buddha, "I have not understood, World-Honored One. I have not understood, Well-Gone One."

So the Buddha recited another gatha for the goddess:

> "When you know the true nature of desire,
> the desiring mind will not be born.
> When there is no desire, and no perception based on it,
> at that time, no one is able to tempt you."

Then Buddha asked the goddess, "Have you understood this gatha? If not, please say so."

The goddess addressed the Buddha: "I have not understood, World-Honored One. I have not understood, Well-Gone One."

So the Buddha recited another gatha for the goddess:

"If you think you are greater, less than, or equal,
you cause dissension.
When those three complexes have ended,
nothing can agitate your mind."

Then Buddha asked the goddess, "Have you understood this gatha? If not, please say so."

The goddess addressed the Buddha, "I have not understood, World-Honored One. I have not understood, Well-Gone One."

So the Buddha recited another gatha for the goddess:

"Ending desire, overcoming the three complexes,
our mind is stilled, we have nothing to long for.
We lay aside all affliction and sorrow,
in this life and in lives to come."

Then Buddha asked the goddess, "Have you understood this gatha? If not, please say so."

The goddess addressed the Buddha, "I have understood, World-Honored One. I have understood, Well-Gone One."

The Buddha had finished the teaching. The goddess was delighted at what she had heard. Practicing in accord with these teachings, she disappeared. Not a trace of her was to be seen anywhere.

Samiddhi Sutta, Samyukta Agama 1078
(Corresponds to Samyutta Nikaya 1.20. Also Taisho 99)

Discourse on the Dharma Seal

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when the Lord was residing at Vaishali with his community of bhikshus. One day, he told the community, "Do you know of the wonderful Dharma Seal? Today I would like to tell you about it and explain it to you. Please use your pure mind to listen and receive it with care, and make the best effort to remember and practice it." The community of bhikshus replied, "Wonderful, World-Honored One! Please teach us. We will listen carefully."

The Buddha said, "Emptiness is neither being nor nonbeing. It is free from all wrong views. It is neither produced nor destroyed, and it cannot be grasped by views. Why is this so? Because emptiness cannot be located in space. It has no form. It is not an object of perception. It has never been born, and the intellect cannot grasp it. Because it cannot be grasped, it embraces all dharmas and dwells only in non-discursive, nondiscriminative wisdom. This is the only true and right understanding, bhikshus! You should know that not only emptiness, but all dharmas are like that. This is the Dharma Seal.

"The Dharma Seal is also called the Three Doors of Liberation. It is the basic teaching of all Buddhas, the eye of all Buddhas, the destination of all Buddhas. Listen and receive it with care. Memorize it well and practice it right in the heart of reality.

"Bhikshus, find a quiet place to meditate, such as in a forest under a tree. There you can see that form is painful, empty, and impermanent, and as a result, you will not be attached to form. You will reach the nondiscriminative understanding of form. Then do the same for feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousnesses. See that they are painful, empty, and impermanent, and rise above wrong views about them. Realize the nondiscriminative understanding of feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. Bhikshus, the Five Aggregates are empty. They are produced from the mind. Once the mind stops operating in its usual way, the aggregates stop operating as well. When you see this, you will be liberated, free from all views. This is emptiness, the First Door of Liberation.

"Bhikshus, dwelling in concentration, see the dissolution of form, and be free from the illusory nature of perception vis-à-vis form. See the dissolution of sound, smell, taste, touch, and mental formations, and be free

from the illusory nature of perceptions vis-à-vis sound, smell, taste, touch, and mental formations. This meditation is called signlessness, the Second Door of Liberation. Once you have entered this door, your knowledge will be pure. Because of this purity of understanding, the three defiling qualities of mind—greed, hatred, and delusion—will be uprooted. With these uprooted, you will dwell in the realm of nondiscursive, nondiscriminative knowledge. When you are dwelling in this knowledge, views concerning 'me and mine,' and thus all views, no longer have the bases and the occasions to arise.

"Bhikshus, once you are free from the view 'I am,' you no longer consider what you see, hear, feel, and perceive as realities independent of your own consciousness. Why? Because you know that consciousness also arises from conditions and is impermanent. Because of its impermanent nature, it cannot be grasped either. This meditation is called wishlessness, the Third Door of Liberation. Once you enter this door, you experience fully the true nature of all dharmas, and you no longer cling to any dharma because you have seen the unconditioned nature of all dharmas."

The Buddha told the community of bhikshus, "This is the wonderful Seal of the Dharma, the Three Doors of Liberation. If you learn and practice it, you will certainly attain pure knowledge."

The monks were very happy to hear the teaching of the World-Honored One. They paid respect to him and promised to learn and practice this wonderful teaching.

Taisho Revised Tripitaka 104*

* For commentary, see Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 1998).

Discourse on the Eight Realizations of the Great Beings

Wholeheartedly, day and night, disciples of the Awakened One should recite and meditate on the Eight Realizations discovered by the Great Beings.

The First Realization is the awareness that the world is impermanent. Political regimes are subject to fall. Things composed of the four elements are empty, containing within them the seeds of suffering. Human beings are composed of Five Aggregates and are without a separate self. They are always in the process of change—constantly being born and constantly dying. They are empty of self and without a separate existence. The mind is the source of all confusion, and the body the forest of all unwholesome actions. Meditating on this, you can be released from the round of birth and death.

The Second Realization is the awareness that more desire brings more suffering. All hardships in daily life arise from greed and desire. Those with little desire and ambition are able to relax, their body and mind free from entanglement.

The Third Realization is the awareness that the human mind is always searching outside itself and never feels fulfilled. This brings about unwholesome activity. Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, know the value of having few desires. They live simply and peacefully, so they can devote themselves to practicing the Way. They regard the realization of perfect understanding to be their only career.

The Fourth Realization is the awareness that indolence is an obstacle to practice. You must practice diligently to transform unwholesome mental states that bind you, and you must conquer the four kinds of Mara in order to free yourself from the prisons of the Five Aggregates and the Three Worlds.

The Fifth Realization is the awareness that ignorance is the cause of the endless round of birth and death. Bodhisattvas always listen to and learn from others so their understanding and skillful means can develop, and so they can teach living beings and bring them great joy.

The Sixth Realization is the awareness that poverty creates hatred and anger, which creates a vicious cycle of negative thoughts and actions. When practicing generosity, bodhisattvas consider everyone—friends and enemies alike—to be equal. They do not condemn anyone's past wrongdoings or hate even those presently causing harm.

The Seventh Realization is the awareness that the five categories of sensual desire—money, sex, fame, overeating, and oversleeping—lead to problems. Although you are in the world, try not to be caught in worldly matters. A monk, for example, has in his possession only three robes and one bowl. He lives simply in order to practice the Way. His precepts keep him free of attachment to worldly things, and he treats everyone equally and with compassion.

The Eighth Realization is the awareness that the fire of birth and death is raging, causing endless suffering everywhere. Take the Great Vow to help all beings, to suffer with all beings, and to guide all beings to the Realm of Great Joy.

These Eight Realizations are the discoveries of great beings, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who have practiced diligently the way of understanding and love. They have sailed the Dharmakaya boat to the shore of nirvana, and have then returned to the ordinary world, free of the five sensual desires, their minds and hearts directed toward the Noble Way. Using these Eight Realizations, they help all beings recognize the suffering in the world. If disciples of the Buddha recite and meditate on these Eight Realizations, they will put an end to countless misunderstandings and difficulties and progress toward enlightenment, leaving behind the world of birth and death, dwelling forever in peace.

Taisho Revised Tripitaka 779*

* For commenatry, see Thich Nhat Hanh *Two Treasures* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2007

Flower Garland Discourse: The Ten Great Aspirations of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva

Body, speech and mind, purified, in oneness,
I bow deeply to touch limitless Buddhas
of the past, present, and future
throughout all worlds in the Ten Directions.

The power of Samantabhadra's vow
enables me to be present everywhere.
Where there is a Buddha, I am there.
As Buddhas are countless, so too am I.

In a particle of dust are countless Buddhas,
all of them present with their own assembly.
The strength of my faith penetrates deeply
into every atom of all Dharma realms.

I aspire to use the Great Ocean of Sound,
giving rise to words of wonderful effect
that praise the Buddha's oceans of virtues,
in the past, present, and future.

I bring these beautiful offerings:
garlands of the most beautiful flowers,
incense, music, perfumes, and parasols,
all to adorn the Tathagatas and their lands.

Bringing food, robes, and fragrant flowers,
torches, sandalwood, sitting mats,
the finest adornments here in abundance —
an offering to the Tathagatas.

Inspired by Samantabhadra's vow,
I bring my heart, wide with deep understanding,
with loving faith in the Buddhas of the Three Times,
as an offering to the Tathagatas everywhere.

From beginningless time I have acted unskillfully
with craving, hatred, and ignorance
in actions of body, speech, and mind.
Determined now to begin anew, I repent.

I rejoice in every virtuous action
by anyone, in any direction,
by students and by those who need learn no more,
of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

All beings who are Lamps for the world
and those who have just attained enlightenment,
I beg that you will think lovingly of us,
turning the Wheel of the Dharma for all.

With sincerity, I make a humble request
of the Buddhas and those who are about to enter nirvana:
remain with us here, throughout the Three Times,
for the benefit and the welfare of all.

I humbly make offerings inviting all Buddhas
to stay with us and guide all beings to the other shore.
All the merit of joyous praise and repenting
I offer to the Path of Awakening.

This merit is transferred to the Three Jewels,
to their nature and form in the Dharma realms.
The Two Truths are perfectly woven together
into the Samadhi Seal.

The ocean of merit is measureless.
I vow to transfer it and not hold anything for myself.
If any human, out of discrimination and prejudice,
tries to do harm to the Noble Teaching
with their words and their actions,
may their obstacles be fully removed.

In each moment, wisdom envelops the Dharma realms,
welcoming all to the place of non-regression.

Space and living beings are without limit,
the same with afflictions and results of past actions.
These four are fully and truly immeasurable.
So, too, is my offering of merit.

Avatamsaka Sutra 36,
Taisho Revised Tripitaka 279

Discourse on the Lotus of the Wonderful Dharma: Universal Door Chapter

Introductory Gatha
Chanting the Lotus Sutra by night,
the sound shook the galaxies.
The next morning when planet Earth woke up,
her lap was full of flowers.

Discourse
Buddha of ten thousand beautiful aspects,
may I ask you this question:
"Why did they give that bodhisattva
the name Avalokita?"

The World-Honored One, beautifully adorned,
offered this reply to Akshayamati:

"Because actions founded on her deep aspiration
can respond to the needs of any being in any circumstance.

"Aspirations as wide as the oceans
were made for countless lifetimes.
She has attended to billions of Buddhas,
her great aspiration purified by mindfulness.

"Whoever calls her name or sees her image,
if their mind be perfectly collected and pure,
they will then be able to overcome
the suffering of all the worlds.

"When those with cruel intent
push us into a pit of fire,
invoking the strength of Avalokita,
the fire becomes a refreshing lake.

"Adrift on the waters of the great ocean,
threatened by monsters of the deep,
invoking the strength of Avalokita,
we are saved from the storm waves.

"Standing atop Mount Meru,
should someone desire to push us down,
invoking the strength of Avalokita,
we dwell unharmed like the sun hanging in space.

"Chased by a cruel person
down the Diamond Mountain,
invoking the strength of Avalokita,
not even an eyelash will be in danger.

"Encircled and assaulted by bandits
holding swords to wound and to kill,
invoking the strength of Avalokita,
sword blades shatter into millions of pieces.

"Imprisoned or bound in iron chains,
with hands and feet placed in a yoke,
invoking the strength of Avalokita,
we are released into freedom.

"Poisons, curses, and bewitchings
putting us into danger,
invoking the strength of Avalokita,
harmful things return to their source.

"Attacked by a fierce and cruel yaksha,
a poisonous naga, or unkind spirit,
invoking the strength of Avalokita,
they will do us no harm.

"With wild animals all around
baring their teeth, tusks, and claws,
invoking the strength of Avalokita
will cause them to run far away.

"Confronted with scorpions and poisonous snakes,
breathing fire and smoke of poisonous gas,
invoking the strength of Avalokita,
they depart, the air clears.

"Caught beneath lightning, thunder, and clouds,
with hail pouring down in torrents,
invoking the strength of Avalokita,
the storm ends, the sunlight appears.

"All living beings caught in distress,
oppressed by immeasurable suffering
are rescued in ten thousand ways
by the wonderful power of her understanding.

"Miraculous power with no shortcoming,
wisdom and skillful means so vast —
in the Ten Directions of all the worlds,
there is no place she does not appear.

"The paths to realms of suffering,
the pain of birth, old age, sickness, and death,
hells, hungry spirits, or animals
are all purified, brought to an end.

"Look of truth, look of purity,
look of boundless understanding,
look of love, look of compassion —
the look to be always honored and practiced.

"Look of immaculate light and purity,
the Sun of Wisdom destroying darkness,
master of fire, wind, and disaster
illuminating the whole world.

"Heart of compassion like rolling thunder,
heart of love like gentle clouds,
water of Dharma nectar raining upon us,
extinguishing the fire of afflictions.

"In the courtroom, the place of lawsuits,
on the fields in the midst of war,
invoking the strength of Avalokita,
our enemies become our friends.

"Sound of wonder, noble sound,
sound of one looking deeply into the world,
extraordinary sound, sound of the rising tide,
the sound to which we will always listen.

"With mindfulness, free from doubts,
in moments of danger and affliction,
our faith in the purity of Avalokita
is where we go for refuge.

"We bow in gratitude to the one
who has all the virtues,
regarding the world with compassionate eyes,
an Ocean of Well-Being beyond measure."

Saddharmapundarika Sutra, Chapter 25,
Taisho Revised Tripitaka 262*

* For commentary on the Lotus Sutra, see Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peaceful Action, Open Heart* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2008).

Store of Precious Virtues Discourse: Practice of the Highest Understanding

Bodhisattvas, those who in this life endeavor to remove
all obstacles and afflictions,
giving rise to a peaceful mind with confidence,
dwelling in awakened calm—
rely on the Practice of the Highest Understanding.

All the rivers on Roseapple Island,
producing the healing herbs, fresh fruits and flowers,
derive their power from the Naga King
who dwells in the cool Manasarowara Lake.

If all the hearer-disciples of the Buddha
use skillful means to teach the Dharma,
help people experience joy, taste the fruit of happiness,
and practice the holy life,
it is due to the sacred power of the Tathagata.

The Buddha transmits the Eyes of the Dharma.
His disciples, training according to it,
practice, realize, and teach it to others.
All that is due to the power and strength of the Buddha.

The incomparable understanding is not to be grasped.
It is not an object of realization. There is no awakening.
Someone who hears this without feeling terror
is a bodhisattva who has the capacity to understand the Buddha.

Form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations,
and consciousness are all empty.
The bodhisattva is not the least bit caught in anything.
He does not settle or abide in any dharma
and realizes the unattainable awakened mind.

When the bodhisattva would leave the shelter of afflictions
and shine her insight on the Five Aggregates,
she sees they are without true nature,
she does not seek the peace of nirvana.
That is to realize the wisdom of a bodhisattva.

What is the object realized by this understanding?
It is to shine the light of insight and see that all is empty.
With this insight, there is no longer any terror.
The bodhisattva awakens himself and others.

Treating the Five Aggregates as real
is not to understand their true nature.
The bodhisattva sees the aggregates as empty
and practices without being caught in the form and in the word.

The Five Skandhas are empty.
The non-practice means the signless practice.
In this practice there is the supreme insight
and the concentration on the signless and nirvana.

If he can practice this silent awakening,
all the Buddhas of the past empower him.
He knows the true nature of causes and conditions.
Neither suffering nor delight can touch him.

If she practices with no object of her practice,
she practices in accord with the wisdom of the Sugata.
If she practices with the spirit of non-practice,
this is the Highest Understanding.

The practice without object cannot be grasped.
Foolish people are caught in the signs "being" and "nonbeing."
Neither "being" nor "nonbeing" can express the truth.
The bodhisattva of Awakened Understanding transcends both.

The bodhisattva, free of signs,
knows that the Five Aggregates are a magic show.
His practice is silent awakening,
which is the Practice of the Highest Understanding.

Taught by good teachers and spiritual friends,
there is no fear of hearing the Mother of
All Buddhas' Discourses.
But with deluded teachers and friends traveling the wrong path,
he is like a clay pot that has not been fired.

Whom do we call a bodhisattva?
She who is no longer caught by sensual desire,
she who aspires to the fruit of awakening
without being caught by it
is thus called a bodhisattva.

Whom do we call a mahasattva?
He who has comprehended the absolute truth
and cuts through all wrong views in the world,
he is thus called a mahasattva, a great being.

With great generosity, great wisdom, and virtuous power,
she sits aboard the highest vehicle of the Buddhas
and gives rise to the awakened mind to save all beings.
Thus she is called a great being.

Like a magician at the crossroads,
giving rise to an illusory crowd and cutting off their heads,
all worlds are just as illusory.
Knowing this, he feels no fear.

The Five Aggregates are ropes that bind.
Knowing they are not real, she does not need to untie them.
She practices with her awakened mind not caught in anything.
That is why she is called the highest bodhisattva.

Whom do we call a bodhisattva? —
the one who rides on the great vehicle to rescue all beings.
The Great Vehicle is as vast as space.
All beings can ride on it in joy and safety.

The great vehicle cannot be grasped by ideas.
It goes to nirvana, but nirvana is everywhere.

We cannot recognize the destination. It is like a fire gone out.
That is why it is said he "enters nirvana."

The object of her practice cannot be grasped.
It cannot be found in the Three Times.
It is the silencing of ideas, fearless and beyond speculation.
This is the Practice of the Highest Understanding.

When a bodhisattva engages in the Practice of the
Highest Understanding
and gives rise to great love and compassion to help beings,
never does he think in terms of "living beings."
This is the Highest Understanding in action.

When a bodhisattva gives rise to the notion "living beings"
and practices austerities, caught in the sign "suffering,"
she is caught in the signs "self" and "living being."
This is not the Highest Understanding in action.

When he knows clearly his own nature
and that of other living beings,
and knows that all dharmas are of the same nature,
that birth and death are not in opposition,
but are not distinguishable from birthless and deathless,
it is the Highest Understanding in action.

Abandoning all names and words,
abandoning all things that are born and die in the world,
there is the nectar of deathless and incomparable wisdom.
This is the Highest Understanding in action.

When the bodhisattva practices like this,
and knows which skillful means to use,
does not pursue anything,
and knows that these means have no separate existence,
this is the Practice of the Highest Understanding.

If she does not rely on form, feelings, perceptions,
mental formations, and consciousness,

and only relies on the perfect teachings,
this is the Practice of the Highest Understanding.

Permanent and impermanent, suffering and joy,
self and selfless, all are empty.
He does not abide in a world of conditioned
or unconditioned elements.
Like the Buddha, he abides in the practice of signlessness.

If you aspire to attain the career of a hearer,
the self-enlightened one, or Buddha enlightenment;
if you do not have endurance of the above practice,
you cannot arrive.
It is like crossing the great river; you cannot see the other shore.

If you hear these teachings and are determined
to realize the highest awakening, witness the awakened mind,
and see that the nature of all things is your own nature,
that is the great wisdom the Tathagata is describing.

A bodhisattva who practices great wisdom this way
does not train in the way of a hearer or a self-awakened Buddha.
She trains only in the boundless knowledge of the Tathagata.
True learning is the learning of no-learning.

He trains in the non-increase and non-decrease of forms.
He does not train in any other way.
His only joy is to train according to boundless knowledge.
The same is true of feelings, perceptions, mental formations,
and consciousness.

Form is neither wisdom nor the absence of wisdom.
Feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness
are also like that.
The nature of form is like empty space—
equality, nonduality, and nondiscrimination.

The basic nature of wrong perception is without limits,
as is the basic nature of all living beings.

The nature of space is without obstructions,
so is the wisdom of the one who perfectly understands the world.

The Buddha has said that insight is not form.
When clinging to perceptions is released, nirvana is there.
Whoever has given up clinging to perceptions,
her mind and speech are said to dwell in suchness.

For as many lifetimes as there are grains of sand in the Ganges,
he will not hear the Buddha utter the words "living beings."
Living beings are birthless, pure, and silent from the very beginning.
This is the Practice of the Highest Understanding.

Since every word I have ever uttered
contains the meaning of the Highest Understanding,
the last Buddha transmitted to me the prediction
that I would awaken in this very life.

The actions of one who receives and practices this understanding,
are not less than that of the Buddha.
Swords, poison, fire, and water, and all the efforts of Mara
will not touch him.

Prajñaparamita Ratnaguna Samcaya Gatha,
Taisho Revised Tripitaka 229

The Diamond That Cuts through Illusion

*Opening Gatha**
How may we overcome the fear of birth and death
and arrive at the state that is as indestructible as a diamond?
How should we practice
in order to remove all wrong perceptions?
Please Buddha, out of compassion
open up the Dharma treasure
and impart the wonderful teachings
for the benefit of us all.

Discourse
This is what I heard one time when the Buddha was staying in the monastery in Anathapindika's park in the Jeta Grove near Shravasti with a community of 1,250 bhikshus, fully ordained monks.

That day, when it was time to make the almsround, the Buddha put on his sanghati robe and, holding his bowl, went into the city of Shravasti to beg for food, going from house to house. When the almsround was completed, he returned to the monastery to eat the midday meal. Then he put away his sanghati robe and his bowl, washed his feet, arranged his cushion, and sat down.

At that time, the Venerable Subhuti stood up, bared his right shoulder, put his knee on the ground, and, folding his palms respectfully, said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, it is rare to find someone like you. You always support and show special confidence in the Bodhisattvas.

"World-Honored One, if sons and daughters of good families want to give rise to the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind, what should they rely on and what should they do to master their thinking?"

The Buddha said to Subhuti, "This is how the Bodhisattva Mahasattvas master their thinking: 'However many species of living beings there are—whether born from eggs, from the womb, from moisture, or spontaneously; whether they have form or do not have form; whether they have perceptions or do not have perceptions; or whether it cannot be said of them that they have perceptions or that they do not have perceptions, we must lead

* Composed by Thich Nhat Hanh.

all these beings to nirvana so that they can be liberated. Yet when this innumerable, immeasurable, infinite number of beings has become liberated, we do not, in truth, think that a single being has been liberated.'

"Why is this so? If, Subhuti, a bodhisattva holds on to the idea that a self, a person, a living being, or a life span exists, that person is not a true bodhisattva.

"Moreover, Subhuti, when a bodhisattva practices generosity, he does not rely on any object—any form, sound, smell, taste, tactile object, or dharma—to practice generosity. That, Subhuti, is the spirit in which a bodhisattva practices generosity, not relying on signs. Why? If a bodhisattva practices generosity without relying on signs, the happiness that results cannot be conceived of or measured. Subhuti, do you think that the space in the Eastern Quarter can be measured?"

"No, World-Honored One."

"Subhuti, can space in the Western, Southern, or Northern Quarters, above or below be measured?"

"No, World-Honored One."

"Subhuti, if a bodhisattva does not rely on any concept while practicing generosity, the happiness that results from that virtuous act is as great as space. It cannot be measured. Subhuti, the bodhisattvas should let their minds dwell in the teachings I have just given.

"What do you think, Subhuti? Is it possible to grasp the Tathagata by means of bodily signs?"

"No, World-Honored One. When the Tathagata speaks of bodily signs, there are no signs being talked about."

The Buddha said to Subhuti, "In a place where there is something that can be distinguished by signs, in that place there is deception. If you can see the signless nature of signs, you can see the Tathagata."

The Venerable Subhuti said to the Buddha, "In times to come, will there be people who, when they hear these teachings, have real faith and confidence in them?"

The Buddha replied, "Do not speak that way, Subhuti. Five hundred years after the Tathagata has passed away, there will still be people who appreciate the joy and happiness that come from observing the precepts. When such people hear these words, they will have faith and confidence that this is the truth. Know that such people have sown seeds not only during the lifetime of one Buddha, or even two, three, four, or five Buddhas, but have, in fact, planted wholesome seeds during the lifetimes of tens of thousands of Buddhas. Anyone who, for even a moment, gives rise to a

pure and clear confidence upon hearing these words of the Tathagata, the Tathagata sees and knows that person, and he or she will attain immeasurable happiness because of this understanding. Why?

"Because that person is not caught in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, or a life span. He or she is not caught in the idea of a dharma or the idea of a non-dharma. He or she is not caught in the notion that this is a sign and that is not a sign. Why? If you are caught in the idea of a dharma, you are also caught in the ideas of a self, a person, a living being, and a life span. If you are caught in the idea that there is no dharma, you are still caught in the ideas of a self, a person, a living being, and a life span. That is why we should not get caught in dharmas or in the idea that dharmas do not exist. This is the hidden meaning when the Tathagata says, 'Bhikshus, you should know that all of the teachings I give to you are a raft.' All teachings must be abandoned, not to mention non-teachings."

The Buddha asked Subhuti, "In ancient times when the Tathagata practiced under the guidance of the Buddha Dipankara, did the Tathagata attain anything?"

Subhuti answered, "No, World-Honored One. In ancient times when the Tathagata practiced under the guidance of the Buddha Dipankara, he did not attain anything."

"What do you think, Subhuti? Does a bodhisattva create a serene and beautiful Buddha Field?"

"No, World-Honored One. Why? To create a serene and beautiful Buddha Field is not in fact to create a serene and beautiful Buddha Field. That is why it is called creating a serene and beautiful Buddha Field."

The Buddha said, "So, Subhuti, all the Bodhisattva Mahasattvas should give rise to a pure and clear intention in this spirit. When they give rise to this intention, they should not rely on forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, or objects of mind. They should give rise to an intention with their minds not dwelling anywhere."

"So, Subhuti, when a bodhisattva gives rise to the unequaled mind of awakening, he has to give up all ideas. He cannot rely on forms when he gives rise to that mind, nor on sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, or objects of mind. He can only give rise to the mind that is not caught in anything.

"The Tathagata has said that all notions are not notions and that all living beings are not living beings. Subhuti, the Tathagata is one who speaks of things as they are, speaks what is true, and speaks in accord with reality. He does not speak deceptively or to please people. Subhuti, if we say that

the Tathagata has realized a teaching, that teaching is neither graspable nor deceptive.

"Subhuti, a bodhisattva who still depends on notions to practice generosity is like someone walking in the dark. She will not see anything. But when a bodhisattva does not depend on notions to practice generosity, she is like someone with good eyesight walking under the bright light of the sun. She can see all shapes and colors.

"Subhuti, do not say that the Tathagata has the idea, 'I will bring living beings to the shore of liberation.' Do not think that way, Subhuti. Why? In truth there is not one single being for the Tathagata to bring to the other shore. If the Tathagata were to think there was, he would be caught in the idea of a self, a person, a living being, or a life span. Subhuti, what the Tathagata calls a self essentially has no self in the way that ordinary persons think there is a self. Subhuti, the Tathagata does not regard anyone as an ordinary person. That is why he can call them ordinary persons.

"What do you think, Subhuti? Can someone meditate on the Tathagata by means of the thirty-two marks?"

Subhuti said, "Yes, World-Honored One. We should use the thirty-two marks to meditate on the Tathagata."

The Buddha said, "If you say that you can use the thirty-two marks to see the Tathagata, then the Cakravartin is also a Tathagata?"

Subhuti said, "World-Honored One, I understand your teaching. One should not use the thirty-two marks to meditate on the Tathagata."

Then the World-Honored One spoke this verse:

> "Someone who looks for me in form
> or seeks me in sound
> is on a mistaken path
> and cannot see the Tathagata."

"Subhuti, if you think that the Tathagata realizes the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind and does not need to have all the marks, you are wrong. Subhuti, do not think in that way. Do not think that when one gives rise to the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind, one needs to see all objects of mind as nonexistent, cut off from life. Do not think in that way. One who gives rise to the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind does not say that all objects of mind are nonexistent and cut off from life."

After they heard the Lord Buddha deliver this discourse, the Venerable

Subhuti, the bhikshus and bhikshunis, laymen and laywomen, and gods and asuras, filled with joy and confidence, began to put these teachings into practice.

Vajracchedika Prajñaparamita Sutra,
Taisho Revised Tripitaka 335*

* For the complete text and commentary, see Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Diamond That Cuts through Illusion* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1992).

Discourse on the Land of Great Happiness

This is what I heard the Buddha say one time when he was staying in the Anathapindika Monastery in the Jeta Grove. At that time the Buddha had with him a Sangha of 1,250 bhikshus, all arhats and the most well-known among his senior disciples, including Shariputra, Mahamaudgalyayana, Mahakashyapa, Mahakatyayana, Mahakaushthila, Revata, Shuddhipanthaka, Nanda, Ananda, Rahula, Gavampati, Pindolabharadvaja, Kalodayin, Mahakapphina, Vakkula, and Aniruddha. There were also present Bodhisattvas of great stature like Manjushri, Ajita, Gandhahastin, Nityodyukta and many other great Bodhisattvas as well as countless heavenly beings including Indra.

At that time the Buddha called Shariputra to him and said: "If you go from here in the western direction and pass through hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddha Worlds you will come to a world called Sukhavati (Great Happiness). In that world there is a Buddha whose name is Amitabha and who is at this very moment teaching the Dharma.

"Shariputra, why is that land called Great Happiness? Because the people who live there do not have to go through any suffering. They are always enjoying many kinds of happiness. And that is why that world is called Great Happiness.

"Shariputra, around Sukhavati there are seven rows of rails, seven rows of spread out netting and seven rows of trees. All are made of the four kinds of precious jewels. That is why the land is called Great Happiness.

"Furthermore Shariputra, in the land of Great Happiness there are many lakes of the seven precious stones, full of the water of the Eight Virtues. The bed of the lake is made wholly of pure golden sand and on the shores are paths of gold, silver, and crystal. Above these paths are countless pavilions which are built of and decorated with gold, silver, crystal, mother-of-pearl, red agate, and carnelians. The lotus flowers in these lakes are as large as cartwheels. The blue lotuses give out a halo of blue light, the golden lotuses a halo of golden light, the red lotuses a halo of red light and the white lotuses a halo of white light. The fragrance of the lotuses is subtle, wonderful, sweet, and pure.

"Shariputra, Sukhavati is adorned with such beauties as these.

"Furthermore Shariputra, in this Buddha Land people can always hear the sound of heavenly music. The earth is made of pure gold. During the

six periods of the day, flowers rain down multitudes of mandarava from the sky. In the morning the people of this land like to take flower baskets made of cloth and fill them with these wonderful flowers in order to make offerings to the Buddhas who live in countless other Buddha Lands. When it is time for the midday meal, everyone returns to Sukhavati and after eating does walking meditation. Shariputra, that is how extraordinarily beautiful Sukhavati is.

"Furthermore Shariputra, in Sukhavati you can always see different species of birds of many wonderful colors, like white cranes, peacocks, orioles, egrets, kavalinkara, and jivanjva birds. These birds sing with harmonious, sweet sounds throughout the six periods of the day. In the song of the birds people can hear teachings on different Dharma doors such as the Five Faculties, the Five Powers, the Seven Factors of Awakening, and the Noble Eightfold Path. When the people of this land hear the teachings in the form of bird songs, their minds are in perfect concentration and they come back to practicing mindfulness of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

"Shariputra, do not think that the birds in Sukhavati have been born as the result of past bad actions. Why? Because the three lower realms of hells, hungry ghosts, and animals do not exist in the land of Amitabha Buddha. Shariputra, in this land the names of the lower realms do not even exist, how much less their actuality! These birds are manifestations of the Buddha Amitabha so that the Dharma can be proclaimed widely in his land.

"Shariputra, in this Buddha Land, whenever a light breeze moves the rows of trees and the jeweled netting, people hear a wonderful sound as if a hundred thousand musical instruments are being played together at the same time. When the people hear this sound, they all naturally return to mindful recollection of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Shariputra, that is how beautiful Sukhavati is.

"Shariputra, why do you think that Buddha is called Amitabha (Limitless Light)? Because he is infinite light which is able to illuminate all worlds in the Ten Directions and this light and radiance never comes to an end. That is why he is called Amitabha.

"What is more, Shariputra, the life span of Amitabha as well as the life span of everyone who lives in his Buddha Land is limitless. It lasts for innumerable kalpas, that is why he is called Amitabha.

"Shariputra, from the time when Amitabha Buddha realized enlightenment until now can be reckoned as ten kalpas. Moreover Shariputra, the number of his hearer disciples who have attained the fruit of arhatship is also limitless. It is not possible to calculate them, so great is their number.

The number of bodhisattvas in that land is also limitless.

"Shariputra, the land of Amitabha is made out of such beautiful qualities as these.

"Shariputra, everyone who is born in Sukhavati naturally has the capacity of non-regression. Among the people living there, many will attain Buddhahood in one more lifetime. The number of these bodhisattvas is infinite, and there is no method of calculation to number them. It may only be expressed by the term limitless.

"Shariputra, when living beings everywhere hear Sukhavati spoken about, they should bring forth the great wish to be born in such a land. Why? Because having been born in that land they will be able to live with and be very close to so many noble practitioners.

"Shariputra, one cannot be born in this land with a lack of merit or wholesome roots. Therefore, Shariputra, whenever men or women of good families hear the name of Amitabha Buddha, they should mindfully repeat that name and wholeheartedly practice visualization with a mind that is one-pointed and not dispersed for one, two, three, four, five, six, or seven days. When that person passes from this life, they will see Amitabha Buddha and the Holy Ones of that land right before their eyes. At the time of their passing, their mind will abide in meditative concentration and will not be deluded or dispersed. That is why they can be born in the Land of Great Happiness.

"Shariputra, it is because I have seen the enormous benefit of this land that I want to tell all who are listening now to bring forth the great wish to be born there.

"Shariputra, as I am now commending the inestimably great benefits and virtues of Buddha Amitabha, there are in the east, in the south, in the west, in the north, above and below, Buddhas as numberless as the sands of the Ganges, each one seated in his own Buddha Field, each one with the long tongue of a Buddha which is able to embrace the three chiliocosms, announcing with all sincerity, 'Living beings in all worlds, you should have confidence in this sutra, which all the Buddhas in the entire cosmos wholeheartedly commend and protect by recollection.'

"Shariputra, why do you think this sutra is wholeheartedly commended and protected by the recitation of all Buddhas? The reason is that when sons or daughters of good families hear this sutra or hear the name of the Buddha Amitabha and wholly put it into practice and maintain mindful recitation of Buddha Amitabha's name, they will be protected by the recollection of all the Buddhas, and they will attain the highest fruit of awakening from

which they will never regress. So you should have faith in what I am saying and what all other Buddhas are also saying.

"Shariputra, if there is anyone who has already brought forth the great aspiration, is aspiring now or will aspire in the future to be born in Amitabha's land, at the very moment when that person makes the aspiration, they already attain the fruit of the highest awakening from which they will never regress, and they are dwelling already in the Buddha Field of Amitabha. It is not necessary that they have been born or are being born or will be born there in order to be present within the Buddha Field of Amitabha.

"Shariputra, while I am praising the unimaginably great qualities of the Buddhas, the Buddhas are also praising my unimaginably great qualities saying, 'Buddha Shakyamuni is very rare. In the Saha world which is full of the five impurities—the cloudiness of time, the cloudiness of views, the cloudiness of unwholesome mental states, the cloudiness of the idea of living being and life span—he is able to realize the fruit of the highest awakening and is able to communicate to living beings the Dharma doors, which people will find hard to believe if they have had no preparation.'

"Shariputra, understand that to stay in a world which is full of the five kinds of impurity and to be able to attain the fruit of the highest awakening and also to be able to transmit to all beings Dharma doors which people find hard to believe, like this Dharma door of being born in Sukhavati, is something extremely difficult."

When Shariputra as well as all the bhikshus, heavenly beings, bodhisattvas, warrior gods, and others heard the Buddha deliver this sutra, they all had faith in it, joyously accepted the teaching and paid respect to the Buddha before returning to their dwelling places.

Sukhavati-Vyuha Sutra,
Taisho Revised Tripitaka 366*

* CFor commentary see Thich Nhat Hanh, F*inding Our True Home (*Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2003).

The Discourse on Emptiness in the True Sense of the Word

This is what I heard one time when the Buddha was residing with the Kuru people, in the village of Kalmasadamya. The World-Honored One addressed the monks: "I will offer you now the Teaching that is good at the beginning, good at the middle and good at the end; good in its meaning and good in taste, pure, and homogeneous, the Teaching that will help you successfully lead the pure and noble life of a monk. This is the Teaching of Emptiness in the True Sense of the Word. Please listen and reflect skillfully on it.

"What does it mean, 'the Teaching on Emptiness in the True Sense of the Word?' The eye, O monks, when it arises does not come from anywhere, and when it perishes it does not go anywhere. Therefore, the eye arises not as a real entity, and having arisen, it perishes. The action is there, the result of the action is there, but there is no actor. One aggregate, while disintegrating, gives rise to another aggregate; and one can only look upon phenomena as mere designation. The same thing is true with regard to the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the consciousness—everything should be looked upon as mere designation.

"What does mere designation mean? It means: 'This being, that is; from the arising of this, that arises, as in the case of the twelve interdependent links. From the arising of ignorance arise formations, from the arising of formation arises consciousness, etc., until the arising of the entire mass of ill-being.' It also means: 'This being not, that is not; since this has ceased, that does not arise anymore, as in the case of the twelve interdependent links. The cessation of ignorance results in the cessation of formations, the cessation of formations results in the cessation of consciousness, etc., until the cessation of the entire mass of ill-being.' That is, O monks, the Teaching called Emptiness in the true sense of the Word."

Thus spoke the World-Honored One. The monks were delighted and joyfully put the teaching into practice.

Samyukta Agama, 335

Discourse on the Absolute Truth

1. He who still abides by a dogmatic view, considering it as the highest in the world, thinking "this is the most excellent" and disparaging other views as inferior, is still considered not to be free from disputes.

2. When seeing, hearing, or sensing something and considering it as the only thing that can bring comfort and advantage to self, one is always inclined to get caught in it and rule out everything else as inferior.

3. Caught in one's view and considering all other views as inferior—this attitude is considered by the wise as bondage, as the absence of freedom. A good practitioner is never too quick to believe what is seen, heard, and sensed, including rules and rites.

4. A good practitioner has no need to set up a new theory for the world, using the knowledge he has picked up or the rules and rites he is practicing. He does not consider himself as "superior," "inferior," or "equal" to anyone.

5. A good practitioner abandons the notion of self and the tendency to cling to views. He is free and does not depend on anything, even on knowledge. He does not take sides in controversies and does not hold on to any view or dogma.

6. He does not seek for anything or cling to anything, either this extreme or the other extreme, either in this world or in the other world. He has abandoned all views and no longer has the need to seek for comfort or refuge in any theory or ideology.

7. To the wise person, there are no longer any views concerning what is seen, heard, or sensed. How could one judge or have an opinion concerning such a pure being who has let go of all views?

8. A wise person no longer feels the need for setting up dogmas or choosing an ideology. All dogmas and ideologies have been abandoned by

such a person. A real noble one is never caught in rules or rites. He or she is advancing steadfastly to the shore of liberation and will never return to the realm of bondage.

Paramatthaka Sutta
Sutta Nipata 4.5