

May 13, 2004 – Dharma Talk given by Thich Nhat Hanh.- New Hamlet, Plum Village

Live Happily in the Present Moment

Good morning, dear sangha. Today is May the thirteenth of the year 2004 and we are in the Loving Kindness Temple in the New Hamlet.

Time – 1:50

I remember in one of my poems I wrote about the person who goes in circles. “Hello the one who is going in circles. What are you doing that for?” And the person answers like this, “I cannot be without going and because I don’t know where to go, that is why I go in circles.” I wrote the poem in Vietnamese. I’m trying to translate into English. “Hello, there, the one who is going in circles. Why are you do that for.” “I cannot be without going and because I don’t know where I should go, that is why I am going in circles.” “My dear friend, it’s OK to go, but you should not go in circles...” If you want to know the rest of the poem, look into the book, “Call Me By My True Names.”

Time – 4:18

In the Buddhist teaching there is the concept of aimlessness. *Apranihita*. In English I would say “aimlessness” - because the word “desirelessness” is misleading. According to this teaching, you are already a Buddha. And you should not try to look for Buddha outside yourself. You are already what you want to become. You are still searching because you still want to deny yourself to become someone else – something else. That is why you do not feel good in your body or in your feelings. You don’t respect yourself. You don’t cherish yourself. You don’t value yourself. You think of yourself only as suffering, as ignorance. You believe that you are of no value and that is why you are searching for what you would call true happiness, true being.

Time – 7:18

Image a wave on the surface of the ocean, searching. What is the wave searching for? In the ultimate dimension the wave is already water and she does not have to look for water. As a wave she may be scared. She wants to look for stability, for peace, for a solid ground. When the ground of the wave is water and if she recognizes she is water, she loses all her fear, her lack of stability and solidity. And we know very well that the wave doesn’t have to die to become water. The wave is the water in the here and now. And it would be funny to imagine a wave running, searching for water. And if you try to *become* a Buddha you are doing very much the same kind of thing.

Time – 9:08

When I was a kid I used to distinguish between the black cloud and the white cloud. There are black clouds; they bring rain. And the white clouds do not bring rain. And I distinguished very well between the black cloud and the white cloud. (Old Path White

Cloud.) Imagine a black cloud trying to become a white cloud. The difference between a black cloud and a white cloud is the light. Right? The light. The difference between a Buddha and you is also light. You don't have to become someone else in order to become a Buddha. You are a Buddha right here and now. You need light to shine on you. The black cloud, if she has light she becomes a white cloud. She does not become, she *is already* a white cloud. And once you stop searching, you stop running; you are free. And aimlessness is that. Not to place something in front of you and run after it. That is the meaning of *apranihita*. *Apranihita* is not to place anything in front of you and run after that. And once you stop that running you have peace. It means that you can establish yourself in the here and the now and you touch all the wonders of life that are in you and around you. And the black cloud becomes the white cloud right away and there is no transformation at all. That is why we speak of non-difference between Buddha and living beings. The Buddha and living beings are not two things. They are the same. And many teachers remind us that the Buddha *is us* - not only in us but *is us*.

Time – 12:25

Walking meditation is a very wonderful way to learn how to stop. You are walking but you don't feel the need to arrive. Because every step you make helps you to arrive in the here and the now. Every step helps you to touch the here and the now with all the wonders of life that are available in the here and the now. If you are a beginner you might like to walk slowly because it is easier for you to establish yourself in the here and the now. But if you are *used* to being in the here and now you can walk faster; and you always find yourself in the present moment. If you do not feel well within your body, in your feelings because you have not touched that peace, that beauty, that wonder of life that is available in yourself and around you. You feel that energy pushing you to go around, to go somewhere, to do something; so that happiness may be possible, freedom may be possible. But freedom is obtained when you *stop* running. You have something to do: it's OK to do it. But why do you have to rush. You have somewhere to go; you may like to go there. But why do you have to rush.

Time – 14:55

This morning we talked about going to the vegetable garden and getting tomatoes. Well, you need tomatoes. It's ok for you to go there and get the tomatoes but why do you have to run? Can you walk to the tomatoes with all your freedom and happiness? Something to do? Somewhere to go? But you don't need to worry, to rush. There is a song at Plum Village that we sing a lot. "Happiness is here and now. I have dropped all my worries. Nowhere to go, nothing to do, there is no need to worry. Happiness is here and now. I have dropped my worries. Somewhere to go, something to do, yes. Still you don't need to worry." The song is a practice song we sing a lot. But we have to do more than singing. We have to live our song.

Time – 16:25

Who is that person that still continues to go around? Do you see him? Do you see her? Recognize him? Recognize her? She does not feel good in her skin - in her feelings. That's why she feels the need to move. Is it not true that in the past that person has already gone around a lot but she has arrived nowhere. And now she still wants to go around and continue to go around. Because there is in her that energy pushing her to go around. And to go around with the hope that you get something you need. In the past you have gone around a lot and you have gotten nothing. In the last 20 years you have gone around and you have gotten nothing. And now in the next 20 years if you go around you will get nothing. And that is why the Buddha offers us the teaching of *apranihita* – aimlessness.

Time – 18:20

Many of us in the school of Pure Land Buddhism believe that the place that we want to go is the pure land of the Buddha in the direction of the West. And there are teachers who urge us to dislike the here and now in order to invest ourselves 100% into the Pure Land. And there are teachers who urge us to do so. They urge us to hate this place – the here and the now – so that we can invest 100% of ourselves into the pure land of the future. And not only in Buddhism but also in other traditions they say that the Kingdom of Heaven is where you should go. You have to invest for the Kingdom.

Time – 19:55

Meanwhile the Buddha said it is possible to live happily in the here and now. And if you read the scriptures with attention, with mindfulness, you can see that teaching a lot. It's like in the sutra given to the White Clad People - means the lay people. The Buddha used the expression, "living happily in the here and now" five times. That day Anathapindika brought many hundreds of businessmen to the Jetta Park. And after having talked to the venerable Sariputra they went to the Buddha as a group of businessmen and the Buddha gave them a talk called – *Upasaka Sutra* – translated as the Sutra Given to the White Clad People because the lay people wear white cloth. And in that sutra the Buddha talked about living happily in the present moment.

Time – 21:55

*“Living happily in the present moment.” **Drista dharma sukha vehari.** Vehari means “to live,” - sukha “happily,”- “in the present moment.”*

Time – 23:10

I'm afraid that if we urge people to hate this place and to invest 100% of themselves into "the pure land of the future," we go against the teaching of the Buddha. Because the teaching of the Buddha is *apranihita* and Master Lin Chi also said the same thing. He said, "You say you want to get out of the three worlds – you want to get away from the three worlds – You stupid people; if you get out of the three worlds, where will you go?" That's what Master Lin Chi said.

Time – 24:30

A few decades ago when the astronauts of Apollo went up there in outer space and looked back at the planet Earth they saw a very beautiful planet. They took a picture and sent it back to us; and it was the first time we saw our planet from a distance. If you were there, you would find out that, in our solar system, we have not found a place like planet Earth. Everywhere it was hostile. The environment was hostile. Only on planet Earth is life possible. And Earth is the bastion of life. It is really a paradise.

Where else do you want to go? You want to leave Earth behind and go where? - The kingdom of God? - The pure land of the Buddha? You have a chance to go up there on the moon for a week and then when you go back to Earth you find that Earth is the best place, the only place you want to go back to. Just looking at grass and listening to the creek you can be very happy. All these wonders of life are available in the here and now and yet you have no capacity of enjoying them. And you are looking for something else.

Time – 26:50

Today there are teachers that advocate for the practice of dwelling in the pure land of the here and now. The pure land is right here. The pure land is right now. And this is also our teaching our practice.

The pure land is here – right here. (*The place where man lives.*) If we are able to establish ourselves in the here and now we can touch all the wonders of life that are available. You can touch with your eyes. You can touch with your ears, nose, tongue, body, and your mind. You are looking for happiness. Happiness is in the here and now. You are not capable of touching them, that is why you still go around and search.

Time – 28:55

What are you searching for? You are searching for love. You are searching for freedom. You are looking for understanding. And you think that these three things will bring you happiness. You know that you are not searching for objects of your desire, or your cravings, namely fame, wealth, power, sex, and so on. Because looking around you see that there are plenty of people who have a lot of fame, a lot of wealth, a lot of power, and a lot of sex but they suffer so much. And you are sure that you are not looking for them.

You want to look for something else like love, freedom and understanding. But where do you look for love? Do you expect someone to love you, to bring you love? Are you sure that someone has the capacity of loving? Are you sure that even if he or she has the capacity of loving you, can receive that love? It's like the sunshine; the sunshine is love, and the air you breathe is also love. Love might be there, always available but are you capable of getting in touch with receiving love? You expect someone to love you and give you love, but are you capable of receiving love? "Am I capable of receiving love?"

I don't think that you can receive love unless you know how to love. You might complain that no one loves you, but ask the question as whether you love someone. Do you love someone? And truly love him or her or do you just pursue him as an object of your desire, of your fame, of your wealth, of your power, of your craving? You complain that no one loves you, and yet you are not capable of loving yourself, loving someone else. Are you capable of taking care of yourself, of your body, of your feelings? - because that is true love. If you don't know how to take care of yourself – to love yourself – how can you expect to take care of someone else and love him or her? And even if someone has a lot of compassion and love and understanding you may not be able to receive that love - to accept that love. You don't have the capacity of recognizing the love in this person because you don't know what is love, you don't have love within yourself. You cannot compare. You do not know what is true love. And you mix up things, you think that the object of craving is love. You complain that no one understands you - in the whole world no one understands ME. But have you asked the question, "Do I understand someone? Do I understand myself." Of course you don't understand yourself because if you do understand yourself, you are already a Buddha. Understanding self is the foundation for understanding others. You don't know what is going on in your body. You don't know what is going on in your feelings, and perceptions, and mental formations. You don't know how to handle this stuff. You have allowed them to be a mess. You have not understood yourself and failing to understand yourself how can you understand someone else. Because to love means to understand. To love yourself you have to understand yourself. To love him or her you have to understand him or her.

Time – 36:13

And you feel that you don't have freedom, but freedom from what? – Freedom to do what you want to do? They don't allow you to do this and do that. You have to suppress your desire. You are not free to express your desire, and to go in the direction of your desire. You want freedom. But freedom is first of all freedom from your anger, from your sorrow, from your confusion, from your attachment. Because all these things bring ill being - all these things bring suffering.

Freedom is our practice, because every minute the practice can help bring freedom to us - freedom from forgetfulness. We forget that life is a wonder. To be alive, to be present in this planet - full of life - full of wonders, is happiness. That the kingdom of God, that the pure land of the Buddha is available in the here and now. Sometime our intellect recognizes that. We accept that - that the wonders of life that the kingdom is here and now and yet we cannot touch. We cannot get in touch with the wonders of life because of our anger, our depression, our uncertainty, our despair. And that is what freedom is first of all freedom from our afflictions. We begin first with our forgetfulness. Take away the Kingdom of God, take away the wonders of life. We practice right mindfulness in order to come home to the here and the now. So that you can touch the Kingdom of God, the Pure Land of the Buddha, the wonders of life in the here and now. Andre Guide said that God is Happiness and God is available 24 hours a day. And if God is available 24 hours a day, the Kingdom of God is available 24 hours a day. The practice is to get in

touch. And the practice of mindfulness is a very concrete way to go home to the here and now in order to get in touch.

Time – 40:40

And if the afflictions in you are a little too strong and mindfulness is not strong enough in order to help you to be firm in the here and now, you need a sangha – you need a practice center where you can be supported by other member of the sangha to do that. And together you can make an effort to go home to the here and now to realize it is wonderful to be present in the here and now - because each moment of our daily life can be a wonder. Each morning we are given one day to live - 24 hours to live - and waking up in the morning we should be able to receive that gift with all our heart. *Waking up this morning I smile. I know that 24 brand new hours are give to me as a gift. And I vow to live each minute deeply and touching the wonders of life and learning how to look at people with the eyes of compassion.* One day is a big gift, a new opportunity. We are given one day this morning and maybe, if we are lucky, tomorrow we will be given another day. And we have to learn how to enjoy each day deeply, and that is our practice. Because if you are not well in your body there is no way you can help another person to be well in his or her body.

Time – 43:10

And we are together in a sangha, in a community to remind each other. When you see your brother the sight of your brother should remind you that it is very fortunate to be alive, to live in a sangha, to be practicing together in order to touch the wonders of life in the here and now. And we should not waste our life. We have wasted a lot of our life - days after days. We practice running. We were not able to touch life deeply – to touch the wonders of life deeply for our transformation, our nourishment, our healing, our happiness. And by practicing like that we bring love – we water the seed of love within ourselves. We know how to take care of ourselves. We know how to smile, how to have compassion on us and how to have compassion on the other person. Because there are seeds of happiness to water every day and there are seeds of suffering and affliction to be transformed every day. And it is wonderful to be together and to be doing the same thing together.

Time – 45:00

When you are a prisoner – you are locked behind bars – you wait for the day when you are liberated. And you begin (to think) that life is only possible beginning the day when you are free, the day they let you go out of the prison. So from now until that day there is no life – there is no chance for you to be happy. And if you sit there and wait for that day, you sacrifice your life in prison. And the worse is that you allow anger and resentment and despair to settle in. It is not good for your health.

So when I went to the correctional institute in the state of Virginia, I just told them that while you are in prison you can be free – you can practice freedom. This is what I said:

“Before I entered this prison I have seen some roses blooming. And once I got into the prison I also have seen some roses blooming. And the roses inside are as beautiful as the roses outside. And the air inside is also like the air outside. So don’t allow the idea of being in prison to be an obstacle. You can practice mindful breathing and enjoy the fresh air in here. And you can practice mindful walking in order to enjoy the roses here because they are as beautiful as outside.” I told the inmate of the prison these kind of things. You don’t have to wait. Life is available in the here and now. Because there are those out there, although they are out there, they are in prison. They are in the prison of their anger, of their despair, of their hate. And they suffer more. And that is why you can be free here. Don’t wait.

Time – 48:35

If we believe that happiness cannot be in the present moment – in the here and now - and if we continue to go around, we are kind of prisoners. We live our life as prisoners. We are locked into the idea that happiness cannot be possible in the here and now, that happiness may be possible in the future and that is why you sacrifice the present and you go in circles.

*Hello the one who is going in circles
What are you doing that for?
I could not be without going
That is why I have to go.
And not knowing where to go
I go in circles.*

It is possible for us to go and find ourselves and find our beloved one - ourselves and our beloved one are available in the here and know. Ask (*yourself*) the question whether you love some one, whether you love yourself? The teaching has been given for you to take care of yourself body and mind - to love yourself so that you are capable of loving someone else. And that someone else is very close to you. Because, if you do not have the capacity to love, you will not have the capacity to receive love. You don’t receive love from the rose, from the fresh air, from the trees, from the river, from your teacher, from your brother, from your sister. You feel cut off. You feel completely alone. You think that love doesn’t exist. Love does exist. It exists in you in the form of a seed. If you know how to water that seed it will manifest in you. To take care of oneself is to take care of our ancestors, of our children, of our community. When you smile, not only do you smile for yourself but you smile for your ancestors, you smile for the world. It is very important to smile. It is very important to take a step in peace in stability. And we are given the teaching as how to do that.

Time – 52:15

Freedom is freedom from fear, from anger, from forgetfulness. And our practice is the practice of freedom. Our practice is the practice of awakening. So that we realize the fact that life is a wonder, that it is possible to live happily in the here and now, that it is

possible to touch the love deeply in us, to take good care of us in order to take care of the other person or persons. That tree in the front yard, that flower in the back yard, they are practicing love. Because by being beautiful they offer love, by being fresh they offer love, And to be fresh, to be loving, that is possible - with the practice. We can regenerate the energy of freshness and love from us and you can help touching the seed of freshness and loving in the other person. And together we can be a beautiful, happy community. We can offer freshness and love for the people who come to us. And each day if we know how to make use it will be a chance for the practice.

Time – 54:48

Twenty-four brand new hours given to us every morning is a very precious gift. The day when you lie down to die you cannot bargain in order to have another day. No matter how rich you are, you cannot bargain to have another day - a single day. Now, today is available and, if you are lucky, tomorrow will be available. So please, be aware that life is something so precious and if we know how to treasure life, we make love and understanding possible for us and for many others, because suffering is there, overwhelming. And there are many who suffer a lot but who do not know how to handle their suffering. We have been given methods of practice in order to handle our suffering and water the seed of happiness in us. We are in an environment that is very rare – very precious. And our planet Earth is really a Buddha Land, is really a Kingdom, is really a Pure Land. And we should live our days in such a way that tomorrow when we are on the point of leaving this body, we will not regret. We can say that, well, I am lucky because I had the opportunity to receive the teaching and I have put my teaching into practice - for me and for the generations to come, because I will continue with the future generations.

End of Dharma Talk