

The Energy of Deep Listening and Compassion

June 9, 2002

Hand of the Buddha Retreat

Today is June the 9th, 2002, and we are in the New Hamlet during our 21-day retreat with the theme, The Hand of the Buddha. I think, in the West, from time to time, you tell the children that they were born from a cabbage. Right? In pure land Buddhism, you are told that you'll be born in a lotus flower. The lotus flower is pregnant with you, and when the lotus blooms, then you see the light. You are born in the lotus flower. It is a very beautiful and poetic image. Pundari, is a kind of lotus. Padme is the word for lotus. There are many kinds of lotus—blue lotus, white lotus, red lotus, and so on. The lotus flower is born from the mud. When a lotus flower blooms, it offers a kind of fragrance that is quite different from the smell of the mud.

Understanding and compassion are born from suffering. Understanding and compassion are born from the ground of suffering and illusion, and that is the mud, which is quite necessary for the birth of a lotus flower. Without the mud, you cannot have the lotus flower. Without the foundation of suffering and illusion, you cannot obtain enlightenment and great understanding and compassion. Therefore, we should see the role of suffering, the role of afflictions, the role of confusion, in making enlightenment and compassion. We should not try to run away from one thing in order to pursue and to obtain another thing. This is the non-dualistic way of looking into reality. If we are too afraid of suffering, we try to run away. We have no chance to encounter and to touch bliss and true happiness.

Happiness and bliss should be found right in suffering. It is suffering that makes us understand. It is the experience of suffering that can bring about our compassion and understanding. So the attitude of running is not a wise one. We have to confront the suffering. We have to embrace tenderly our pain and suffering. We have to look deeply into the heart of suffering, into the nature of suffering, in order to really see the path of transformation and healing.

Nirvana is not something separated from samsara. If you want to look for nirvana, look for it in samsara—samsara, the wheel of birth and death, the maze of suffering. The only place where you can find nirvana, total emancipation, is the world of suffering. We used to think that the Kingdom of God is something quite far away from our suffering world. Because we have suffered, we have the tendency to leave this world behind in order to look for a place where there is no suffering.

Finding a place where there is no suffering, that is the desire of many, many people. We don't want suffering. We only want happiness. But in the teaching of the Buddha, we know already that happiness is made of non-happiness elements, namely suffering. It's like the left is made of the right. If the right is not there, there is no way to have the left.

Politically, if you are with the left, you would hate the right. You would wish the right not to be there. But if the right is not there, the left cannot be there either. You want to eliminate the right. You might use a knife, a saw, in order to cut, but as soon as you finish cutting off a portion of the right, the very place where you cut becomes the extreme right. So, those of you who are on the left should wish for a long-lasting right.

The same thing is true with happiness. Happiness cannot be possible without suffering. It is against the background of suffering that you can recognize happiness. If you have never been hungry, you would not know the pleasure of having something to eat. If you have not gone through the war, you do not know how precious is peace. The majority of us would like to go to a place where there is no suffering, but that is a very naïve way of seeing things. And yet, most of us are caught in that—to leave behind something in order to run after something else. When you can see the Pure Land, or the Kingdom of God, we still keep that tendency to see the Pure Land as a place where there is no suffering at all, the Kingdom of Heaven as the place where there is only happiness.

When I reflected deeply into the matter, I saw that I wouldn't like to go to a place where there is no suffering, because I know that such a place is not a situation where we can cultivate our understanding and compassion. If you don't know what suffering is, if your child does not know what suffering is, it is impossible for you and your child to develop understanding and compassion. Compassion and understanding are possible only when suffering is there. You learn from the suffering. You experience suffering, and out of that, understanding of suffering is obtained and compassion can be born.

Compassion is compassion about what? Vis à vis what? Compassion, you can see suffering inside it. If there is no understanding, no contact with suffering, there is no compassion. Therefore, in order to cultivate your understanding and compassion, suffering must be there. And if you go to a place where there is no suffering, it is the worst place for you to train yourself in compassion and understanding. I wouldn't like to go to a place where there is no suffering. I cannot grow, in such a place, into a person that has understanding and compassion.

My definition of the Pure Land, my definition of the Kingdom of Heaven, is “the place where understanding and compassion exist”. When these things exist, wherever these things exist, suffering exists also. We are not drowned in the ocean of suffering. You touch suffering, but touching suffering, you cultivate your understanding and your compassion.

This place is perfect for that. You can touch suffering in your daily life. You can cultivate understanding and compassion in your daily life. Suffering plays an important role in our spiritual growth. With the capacity of looking deeply into suffering, with the capacity of understanding and being compassionate, you are no longer afraid of suffering. You no longer sink into the ocean of suffering, and you can ride on the waves of birth and death with joy, like Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara.

Suffering, ill-being, is the first noble truth, the first holy truth. Why should we call suffering “holy”, “noble”? Because by looking into the nature of suffering, we can see the path of transformation and healing. That is why the first truth is also a “noble” truth, a “holy” truth. That is why the first truth is called a noble, holy truth—because suffering helps us to understand and to love. If we allow ourselves to be drowned in the ocean of suffering, then suffering is no longer holy, suffering is no longer noble. That is why the practice of looking deeply into the nature of suffering is very crucial. It's only by looking into suffering that you can see the path.

If you try to run away from suffering, it is no longer a truth, and you've missed the opportunity to see the path. Not having a path is the most distressing thing. The Fourth Noble Truth can only be found in the First. You cannot find it elsewhere. You have to find it in the First. The cessation of suffering, the path leading to the cessation of suffering, must be found in suffering itself.

The sangha is a community that practices mindfulness, and among the objects of mindfulness, the mindfulness of suffering is there. Suffering is a reality. We recognize suffering. We embrace the suffering dearly, tenderly, with our mindfulness in order for us to look deeply into the nature of our suffering. By that act, by that practice, we come to understand suffering, and we come to see the path out of suffering. That is the basic practice—recognizing suffering, understanding suffering, seeing the path of transformation.

So, sangha has something to do—recognizing suffering and looking deeply into suffering. When we come together in order to discuss a problem, a problem of our suffering, we sit together and we try to offer what we know about it, about the situation, and what we think to be a helpful solution. In the West we have the expression, “brainstorming”. You get together and you tell everyone in the group what is in your head. Every idea you have in your head, you tell them. There are many ideas that are triggered by other people's ideas. Brainstorming. You can get a lot of ideas from sitting and listening to each other's ideas. It's very productive. This is a form of dharma discussion. Everyone has a resource of experience, of insight. When you sit down together like that and do the work of brainstorming, you offer all you have concerning experience and insight. If you combine all insight and experience, you have the collective experience and insight. That's how people in the world do it.

What is the difference between that and the work of a sangha? To make it clearer, after you have a brainstorm, after you have offered everything, every idea, every experience you have, you should have more resources in order to continue to offer. But how can you get more resources and more experience and more wisdom? By exposing yourself more to the situation of suffering, the situation of difficulties, and contemplating that situation and looking deeply into that situation. That is exactly the teaching of the Four Noble Truths. When you do the work of brainstorming, you use only your intellect, but underneath you already have experiences and insight stored in your consciousness. So you use your mind consciousness to bring every insight, every experience you have in order to offer it. That is good. But after you have done that, nothing is left in the lower layer of your consciousness. After a number of sessions of brainstorming, you have nothing left to offer.

A sangha is a community of people who practice day and night in order to refill and to enrich the store of experiences and insights by the practice of continued mindfulness and concentration. That is a big difference, because every day you are nourished by the mindfulness. You get in touch with reality, reality inside of you and around you. You embrace that reality deeply. You look deeply into that reality. That is why you continue to have more insight to offer.

That is why a peace conference, a peace organization, in the Buddhist spirit, has to be organized in the form of a retreat. There must be hours of sitting. There must be hours of silent walking. There must be hours of deep contemplation, in order for us to replenish our insight. Because while we do that, we open ourselves. We are exposed to reality, the reality of suffering, of the

difficulties. We know how to generate the energy of mindfulness, in order to recognize, to embrace, what we hear, what we experience. Out of that we have concentration. With concentration, looking deeply, surely we have more insight.

Suppose a peace conference is organized in the setting of a retreat. Every member of the conference has the time to sit quietly, to breathe, to calm, to recognize, to embrace the suffering and the difficulties. Each day there is only one hour of sharing, of offering. Suppose we have a peace conference like that for 21 days or a month. The peace conference should be much more productive than if we just come together and talk and talk and talk.

When we come together, we still have a lot of emotion, because we have come from a situation of war, of distress, of hatred, of anger. We are not calm enough to listen to the other person. We are not calm enough to express ourselves in such a way that the other person can have the courage to listen. That is why there may be a lot of talking back and forth, but what we receive, what we offer, is much bigger. That is why, if you are organizers of a peace conference, you should allow people to have a number of days in order to calm down. We in the tradition know how to calm ourselves down, the techniques of mindful walking, the techniques of mindful breathing, the techniques of total relaxation, deep relaxation.

(Bell)

Politicians, when they organize a peace conference, (remember, “peace” conference), they have to invite us to help them with how to calm themselves, to calm their emotions—hatred, fear, despair—because that is peace—because we are talking about a peace conference. If there is no peace in the participants, that cannot really be called a peace conference. That is a fight, a continued fight. So if meditators, practitioners of meditation, want to do something to help with peace, the peace conference is the way of organizing an environment where people have a chance to calm down, to embrace their feelings, to get a relief—because without calm, you cannot see things clearly. This is very, very clear. When your mind is not calm, it is like an ocean in a storm. It cannot reflect the full moon. Only when the river is still can she reflect the full moon.

The same thing is true with our mind. When our mind is not peaceful, when we are not master of our body and our mind, what we suggest, what we say, cannot reflect peace. It reflects something else. Then the peace conference becomes a place where people fight for their ideas, for their interest. There is no possibility to understand other people because we do not even understand ourselves.

I wish politicians, like Mr. Bush, Mr. Clinton, Mr. Blair, and other heads of state, would realize this. There must be peace inside in order to make peace outside. A peace conference needs techniques of organizing from those of us who know how to calm our bodies, how to calm our feelings, how to get relief; from those of us who know how to listen deeply to the other people, how to use the kind of language that can convey our suffering and our experience. It’s a very important practice. Participants in a peace conference should be able to practice that to some extent in order for the peace conference to become fruitful. Those of us who have the duty of organizing conferences, especially a peace conference, have to take this into account. A peace

conference in the setting of a retreat is very important. We should have enough time in order to calm down and to reflect the situation.

There are peace negotiations that go on and on and on without bringing about anything substantial because we don't know how to be peace and to talk peace. To be peace is the foundation and to do peace is something that comes a little bit later. We have to trust our *alayavijñāna*, our store consciousness. It's like a farmer has to trust the earth. When the farmer plants some seeds into the soil, he should have plenty of trust. It is not the farmer that brings about flower and fruit. It is the earth. The earth here is store consciousness and mind consciousness is only the gardener. Mind consciousness has the duty to plant the seed of awakening, the seed of insight into the soil of *alaya*, store consciousness. Day and night, with continued practice, the earth is nourished. The earth is watered. One day the seed will sprout and offer the insight. That is meditation. We do not meditate with our mind consciousness alone. Brainstorming is to use only the mind consciousness. After the mind consciousness has exhausted everything in the store, there is no more to offer. But, for practitioners, there will be more to offer because they continue to be the earth, to take care of the earth. The farmer now knows how to take care of the earth day and night.

In the koan, you ask the question of how to get out of the situation. It's the seed that you plant in the depth of your consciousness, not just on the upper level of your consciousness, not only in mind consciousness. That is the principle. In a true peace conference, you have to confide in the store consciousness, the role of generating insight. Even while you sleep, your store consciousness continues the work. Meditation takes place during the night when you sleep. Mind consciousness only works during the daytime.

I remember when I was a child, one day I looked into the water container in the front yard and I saw a very beautiful leaf in the bottom—so many colors. I would have liked to take the leaf in order to play, but my arm was way short. I could not reach the bottom of the water container. So I used a stick and tried to take it out. It was so difficult. I was impatient. I stirred. I stirred twenty times and thirty times and yet it did not come to the surface. So I gave up. I threw away the stick and I gave up. A few minutes later when I came back, the leaf was on the surface of the water and I took it. While I was away, the water continued to turn and after that, it brought the leaf up to the surface.

That is the way our store consciousness works. Mind consciousness has to confide in store consciousness the duty of finding the insight. Mind consciousness, during the day, provides all the conditions for store consciousness to work. Sometimes, before going to sleep, you tell your store consciousness, "Tomorrow, I want to wake up at 4:30." You just tell like that, and tomorrow you wake up at 4:30. Your store consciousness knows how to listen and it collaborates with us. To meditate, you not only use your *manovijñāna*, mind consciousness, you should know how to trust, to use, your store consciousness. When we plant the seed in the soil, we trust the soil. The mind consciousness should plant the koan into the soil of store consciousness and not superficially in the level of mind consciousness.

A peace conference must take place, must be organized, in that spirit. We have to rely on the collective insight offered by the collective store consciousness of all those who are in the

conference. That's why we should know the techniques of taking care of our store consciousness, our collective store consciousness in order to have the greatest insight possible. Later on, when we are more civilized, our Parliament will operate like that. Every member of the Parliament will know how to practice in order to have our store consciousness offer the best insights. By the practice of deep breathing, of calming, of allowing ourselves to be, of looking deeply, we can help our store consciousness to offer the best. If you are a member of the Parliament, you are invited to think about the way for a parliament to offer the best. Not only psychotherapists should learn about our unconscious, our store consciousness, but people in the House, people in the Senate should know about it and make good use of that part of our consciousness in order to serve our people in our country.

If you write an article about that, whom would you like to vote into the Congress? You say that you would like to vote for those who know how to offer the best insight for the benefit of the country, for the people. This is what I think that a member of Parliament can do in order to have more and more insight, to have the greatest kind of insight. You offer the way based on your experience of practice.

A sangha coming for a retreat should work together on a theme, a koan, because everyone is embracing the same koan. Everyone has entrusted his or her store consciousness with that grain. While eating mindfully together, while walking mindfully together, sitting mindfully together, we nourish that koan. We allow the soil of our consciousness to hold dearly that koan insight. One day, when you wake up, you've gotten the insight. The collective insight is possible and no insight can be compared to the collective insight. We do that on a personal level. We do that as a sangha, as an organism. We have dharma discussions. We share our insight. We share our experience. Our insight, our experience, will help the insight and experience of everyone in the sangha.

That reflects the Sixth Togetherness, sharing the same insight. Whatever insight you have got, you share with the sangha, and your insight will trigger the insight in other members of the family. We work like a scientist. Everyone who has been able to discover something, publishes that discovery. Everyone profits from that discovery in order to further his or her studies and research. A community of scientists, a community of practitioners, should always share, should always offer their insight. Sharing our insight is one of the Six Togethernesses. The Six Togethernesses is wonderful. Sharing our insight is one of the Six which makes the sangha into an authentic, genuine sangha. If there are insights, there is concentration. If there is concentration, there is mindfulness. If these three elements are there, the Buddha is there. The Dharma is there. So please do elaborate on this.

Personally, I trust my store consciousness deeply. That is why I don't worry. It's very wonderful. I don't have to worry. When I was young, every time I thought of speaking, of teaching, I still worried about what to teach, how to teach, how to help people, how to succeed in helping people, how not to disappoint people. With time, with my practice, that kind of worry died down slowly. Now, I don't worry anymore. Even if I have to go on a three-month teaching tour, I don't worry at all. I don't even worry about my health. I trust my store consciousness. It makes a big difference. I don't work my mind consciousness part at all. I don't force my mind consciousness

to work hard. I don't use my mind consciousness very much. I like my mind consciousness to play the role of a gardener. I'd rather trust the garden.

Perhaps you think that I speak from out of my notebook. That's not the case. My notebook is used mostly to remind me of what I have said yesterday, so I will not repeat myself. It's funny, but that's the case. Only twenty years ago, I remember, every Thursday, every Sunday, we gathered together in order to have walking meditation and then a dharma talk. We used to do walking meditation together. We came, and when the time came we invited the bell, and we did walking right away. Walking in the morning is very refreshing, very pleasant. We used to contemplate the beautiful trees in the fog. I have asked my students to each write a song about the lone tree standing in the fog. It's so beautiful. I remember very well that during walking meditation, I did not think about the dharma talk. Walking meditation is walking meditation. You have to devote 100 percent of your body and your consciousness to making solid, pleasant steps.

If you are a dharma teacher, and all of you are dharma teachers, you can profit from my experience. Don't prepare your speech in advance. Don't worry about your talk. Don't spend the whole night thinking "What shall I say?", making research into books and sutras and making a lot of notes, and when the time comes, you speak from your notes. That's not the best kind of dharma talk. The best kind of dharma talk is not prepared in advance. You have to trust your insight. You have to trust your store consciousness. You come like that and you look at your friends, and suddenly you know what to say. You get in touch with your disciples. You get in touch with your audience. You get in touch. You look at them. You get a view of what you should offer today, because the dharma talk should always be a dharma talk for someone, for some people. If the talk does not respond to the real need and the suffering of people, it's not a true dharma talk, no matter how long you have prepared, no matter how much research you have done in order to have the talk. A good dharma talk is a natural response to the situation.

In Plum Village, there are many, many intimate dharma talks. These talks respond to real situations in the sangha, especially the permanent residential sangha. Living in a sangha, I am exposed to all the happiness and the difficulties of the sangha. The happiness and the suffering are made known to me and all of that enters into the store of my consciousness. Because of the practice, I hold them day and night, even during my sleep. That is why when I find myself in a sangha looking at the faces of my friends, I know exactly what to offer. It comes at that very minute. That is why the dharma talk is always appropriate.

Appropriateness is one of the characteristics of a good dharma talk. A dharma talk should be appropriate to two things. Appropriateness [*unknown foreign word*] means, first of all, it goes perfectly well with the spirit of the teaching. Second, it goes perfectly well with the situation. If it goes only with the teaching, and does not meet the need of the audience, it's not a good dharma talk. It's not appropriate. It has to be appropriate from both sides—the true teaching and the actual suffering, actual difficulties. If a dharma talk does not respond to these elements it's not a good dharma talk. A good dharma talk should have the power of shining the light, helping people to see deeply and release them from suffering. That is why, listening to the dharma talk, people may have a chance to get a release from their suffering just during the time of listening. They don't need to practice. If the dharma talk touches their real concern, their real suffering, it can unblock the obstacle, the difficulties that are there in the mind of the listener. You can free

yourself. You get enlightenment just by listening to a talk, because the talk is so appropriate. Sometimes you have the feeling that the talk is only directed to you. The teacher speaks directly to you and to you alone. When there are so many people who have that feeling, you know that this is a good dharma talk. Appropriate means to go perfectly well with the spirit of the dharma and to respond perfectly with the situation in which the dharma talk is delivered.

I learned very much from that kind of practice. I always resist thinking about the dharma talk while doing walking meditation. The result is always good, always wonderful. Dharma talks, unprepared, are always much better than carefully prepared dharma talks. It should come directly from your store consciousness, your direct insight. Dharma talks are not a set collection of information. A dharma talk is not a set of information. A dharma talk is a tool, an instrument to help unblock, liberate, the people who listen. You don't need a lamp transmission in order to do that. Don't wait. Don't wait until you get the lamp transmission. You can be a good teacher. You can be giving wonderful dharma talks right now, because there is not one moment when that transmission has not been given to you.

When the sangha practices walking meditation, when your teacher practices walking meditation, transmission is taking place. When you eat with the sangha, when you eat with your teachers, transmission is being made. Transmission is the business of every minute of the day, every moment of the day. If you are open, and you get the transmission every minute, you don't need a ceremony. The day when you receive the five or the ten or the fourteen mindfulness trainings, that day you are born in your spiritual life, very concretely. You become a child of the Buddha. You become a child of the sangha. You become a child of your teacher. In our tradition, you are born from the mouth of your teacher, not from a cabbage, not from a lotus flower. You are reborn from the mouth of your teacher. That expression is found in Buddhist sutras. Every Buddhist in the Buddha's time considered himself to have been born from the mouth of the Buddha, because the mouth symbolizes the teaching. Actually, my disciples have been born from my mouth. That is a very Indian means of expression. You are a child of the Buddha. You have been born from his mouth. You are nourished by the sangha. You continue to grow.

Your intellect is just one tiny part of you. You have your store consciousness containing everything and you share that collective store consciousness. Great understanding, great compassion comes from that. You have the seed of great enlightenment, great compassion in your consciousness. The practice is for the farmer to take care of that seed, to entrust that seed to the soil of store consciousness and to water it every day, to offer every condition for store consciousness to work in order to offer insight. So use your intellect, use your mind consciousness, as the gardener tending the garden, tending the soil. Arrange so that the soil can have every condition possible in order to work on that. Trust deeply your store consciousness. That is the store of the Tathagata also, *Tathagatagarbha*.

I would like to go back a little bit on how a retreat should be organized—whether it is a rain retreat, a 21-day retreat, or a peace conference organized in the formula of a retreat. People of the same concern should come together as a sangha. Then they will not be working with their intellect alone. They will bring along their store consciousness. We arrange our daily life in such a way that there is plenty of time to allow our store consciousness to offer the best. The practice of deep relaxation, the practice of calming, the practice of nourishing, the practice of

mindfulness, concentration, should be offered on the sangha level. We live together. We share everything together. We practice together. We are nourished by each other. All of us are nourished by the collective energy of the sangha. We all hold dearly within ourselves that question mark, sometimes called a *koan*, a theme of meditation.

There is a koan, a theme of meditation that goes like this: Where were you before your mother, your grandmother, was born? Where were you? If you consider it to be a philosophical question, it's not a koan. You may get some concentration. You may find something, and then you focus your attention on other things. A koan is something that should capture all your attention day and night. Focusing on that is a matter of life and death. It should be a matter of life and death in order to be a real koan. You have to invest 100% of your flesh, your bone, and your mind into it in order to get a breakthrough. Especially when you work with the sangha, the sangha is holding the same question. Insight will be something that will happen.

A scientist sometimes works like this but they may not know it. They have a question in their mind. They're so interested in that question that their whole mind, their whole body, is focused on that. They don't pay attention to other things. They just nourish that. Their mind is on it, but their store consciousness is on it too. They're somehow obsessed by that question. They are so interested, so concerned about how to find the answer. So concentration becomes something natural. No matter whether you want or don't want concentration to become a reality, sitting, eating, doing things like that, you are concentrated on it. You cannot take it out of your mind—not only your mind, but your consciousness. During the night when you sleep, you still work on it. This is something natural.

As a writer, you might have had that experience, too, perhaps if you write a short story, and if you like your short story a lot. In the beginning, you may not know how the story will end. You just start the story and you allow the story to continue. Many of us storywriters do not know the whole story. We just start the story and we allow the story to go on as our store consciousness offers. That is why even during your dreams, you continue writing your short story.

It means that when you are deeply interested in something, you involve store consciousness. Day and night, you are focused. That kind of concentration becomes natural. Even if you don't want to concentrate, you are concentrated. You are embracing very deeply, very tenderly, that question. One day, when you sit and your mind does not seem to think about it, it comes. It comes very suddenly. Maybe an apple falls on your head and you get enlightened and you understand the law of gravity. So the scientists, many of them, can do it the same way. They didn't know that meditation was taking place. They did involve their store consciousness and not just their mind consciousness.

How powerful, if we can do that on the sangha level! The sangha level is the new Buddha, the coming Buddha. That is why we should organize a sangha in such a way that makes great insight possible. It is that great insight that will save us and save the earth. So that is an invitation: How to organize sangha? How can sangha be the great hope, the great inspiration? How to offer the best of what the sangha can offer? That has to do with taking refuge in sangha. Taking refuge in the sangha is not only for our individual sake. It is for the sake of the world.

(Bell)

Today, we should focus our attention on Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. That is the theme of a chapter in the Lotus Sutra. It is available in the chanting book, the English version of **The Plum Village Chanting Book**, the verses of the chapter. In the chapter there is prose and there are verses. In the chanting book you have the verses, not the prose. According to researchers, the verses are older than the prose because oral transmission is much easier to memorize as verses. That is why for many Mahayana sutras, the verses, the gathas, are the oldest part of the sutra and the prose was written later on.

That is chapter 25, The Gateway to Everywhere of the Bodhisattva, He Who Observes the Sounds of the World. I think that there are a number of chanting books available and that is on page 291 of The Chanting Book. In English, this chapter is called the Chapter of the Universal Door. *Samanta mukha*(?)— this is the door. This is universal. When you drive, and you are caught in the city, and you want to look for an exit that allows you to go to another city, there are many paths that lead to another city. Then you see the sign, *Toutes Directions, All Directions*. There it is—Universal Door—an exit that can lead to anywhere you want to go. This is the exit for all directions, no matter what destination you want to reach. This door will allow you to do it. The personage, the character in this chapter, the performer, is Bodhisattva Kwan Yin, He Who Observes the Sounds of the World. Universal—it also means: to cover everything, every place and every time; to cover time and space; the kind of practice that can respond to all kinds of situations of suffering.

This chapter is also about love. Love is the answer. Avalokiteshvara is the Bodhisattva of Love, of compassion. It might be interesting to go through the verses together to understand what is meant by Universal Door. *Fokka*(?) means: to cover; to cover all kinds of ground, all kinds of situations.

(Bell)

Avalokiteshvara sometimes is translated as Quan Yin, and the translation *Quan Thé Âm* is very popular. Kwan means: to observe, to look deeply into, to recognize, to study deeply. Kwan is the Chinese word to translate the Sanskrit word *vipashyana*. It goes with *shamatha*. Shamatha means: concentrating, calming, stopping. Shamatha and *vipashyana* are the two elements of meditation—to stop, to concentrate, and to look deeply into it; to stop on that subject, to calm ourselves, to select the subject and to look deeply into it. That subject may be your anger, your despair, the difficult situation in which you find yourself. Kwan, here, means: to look deeply, to observe, to meditate. *Tuthaya*(?) means freedom. Thanks to the practice of looking deeply, you get the freedom that you need. In the Chinese version of the Heart Sutra, the name Quan Yin is used.

The Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, while moving in the deep course of looking deeply, found out that everything is empty of a separate existence. Upon that realization, he became free of all afflictions. So in the first sentence is looking deeply. In the second sentence is freedom. The first sentence of the Heart Sutra is the definition of Avalokiteshvara: he who practices looking deeply into the five elements got the insight that liberated him from suffering. That is a beautiful name. The other name is: to observe, to listen, to look deeply into the sound of the world, the cries of

the world, the expression of the world, because many living beings express themselves in a different way. No matter if they express themselves well or not well, the bodhisattva can always understand. If it is a child who does not have enough words to express himself, the bodhisattva is able to understand that child. Whether that person expresses himself in language or bodily expression, the Buddha also understands.

So the object of concentration, here, is the sound, the sound of the world, the cries of the world, because suffering can express itself in the sound, especially the cry. In the Suragama Sutra, it describes how Avalokiteshvara got enlightenment because of the practice of observing, looking deeply into the sound of the world. Usually, when we speak of looking deeply, we speak of the object as sight and not sound. Looking deeply, here, is looking deeply into the sound. There is a bodhisattva whose name is Akshayamati, Inexhaustible Mind, who heard about the name of Avalokiteshvara. He was very interested because that name is so interesting. Who is he? Who is that bodhisattva who has such a beautiful name? That is the question that triggered the answer of the Buddha, which is the object of this chapter.

“Avalokiteshvara, The One Who Observes the Sound of the World—it’s interesting—who is that, Lord Buddha. Tell us.” And the Buddha begins to talk about Avalokiteshvara.

*Buddha of the 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 (Inexhaustible Mind)
“Because actions founded on her deep aspiration
can respond to the needs of any being in any circumstance.*

This is the definition of Universal Door. The actions of Avalokiteshvara can respond to the need of any being and in any circumstances. It means the response can cover all ground, time and space. In this translation that was made by Sister Anabel, Avalokiteshvara is a She. Many people in Asia think of Avalokiteshvara as a She. In fact, the person can be a He, as explained in this sutra. Avalokiteshvara can manifest herself as a businessman, as a politician, as a child, as a yaksha, as a dragon, as a horse, as a flower. If the situation needs her presence or his presence, he will be there in the appropriate form in order to respond to the suffering.

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

Her vow, her aspiration, is as wide as the ocean and that has happened in many, many lifetimes in the past. She has attended to many, many Buddhas in the past and she has given rise to her great aspiration, her great and purified aspiration.

*“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.*

I will tell you briefly that whoever knows to call the name of Avalokiteshvara, or to visualize her image in such a way that their mind becomes perfectly concentrated and pure, that person can overcome all kinds of suffering in the world. This is very important. We can begin by using the name of Avalokiteshvara, or by visualizing his or her image. Calling the name is a very popular practice, not only in Buddhism, but in all other spiritual traditions. Nama japa(?). Japa(?) means: repetition, praying, prayer, reciting, murmuring—because the name of the bodhisattva may give birth to something in your mind. Your mind becomes mindful. Your mind becomes concentrated and you become calm, lucid. Reciting and calling the name of Avalokiteshvara in such a way that your mind becomes still and concentrated, you will be able to overcome the suffering you are having. Or, if you just visualize the beauty of the bodhisattva—the sight (rupa japa) of a person riding majestically on the waves of birth and death, free—then that image in your mind will help your mind to be concentrated, mindful and pure and then that will help you to overcome the suffering that is in you. So it is very clear that you cannot do it like a machine. You call the name in such a way, you practice nama japa(?) in such a way, that your mind becomes still, calm, pure and concentrated.

“All existence” here means the kama dhatu, the realm of desire, the realm of form, and the realm of non-form—the realm of subtle form and the realm of no form—the three dhatus, the three worlds. Sometimes we live in the realm of no-form. Sometimes we dwell in the realm of form, and sometimes we dwell in the realm of desire, deep attachment. We travel in the triple world every day. Sometimes we are caught in the realm of desire for too long. Unless we have a brother or sister in the dharma to pull us into the realm of form or non-form, we still get caught in the realm of desire. Wherever, in whatever realm, you can practice. If you are caught in suffering, then visualize the bodhisattva, or call his name in such a way that your mind becomes mindful—mindful of that sound, mindful of that image. That mindfulness brings about concentration and then you have a chance to overcome the suffering. This is already the practice. This is not just devotion, not just bhakti. This is already the beginning of the practice of vipashyana. It is the practice of calming—calming by using the sound and the image, because that sound should invoke an entity. If you just call the name and visualize the form, like a machine, it will not provoke any calm, any mindfulness.

There’s a lady who practices calling the name of Amita Buddha every day, maybe ten thousand times a day—Namo Amita Buddha—but that has not changed her life at all. She uses a bell. She uses a drum. She burns a lot of incense every day, but that does not change her life at all. She’s still very angry. The element of diligence is there. The goodwill is there, but the practice is not correct so it does not bring her anything. We have to look into her case in order to adjust our practice. One day a neighbor decided to test her and he came to the gate of the house (between the gate and the house there is 30 meters or something like that) and he called her. He chose the moment when she began her practice. First of all she tried to ignore him. He knew that it was her session of practice, but he continued to call out her name. So she got irritated and hit harder on the bell, she hit harder on the drum. That was an indirect way to say, “You naughty person! Don’t

you know that this is my time of practice? Go away!” The man understood the message, yet he still called her name even louder than before. This kind of struggle went on between the two. Finally she gave up. She surrendered. She threw away the bell and she shouted, “Why do you disturb people at a time like this? Didn’t you hear that I was practicing?” The man looked at her, smiling, and said, “I just called your name about 50 or 60 times and you got angry like that and you are calling the Buddha’s name thousands and thousands of times, he must be very angry at you!” That is a true story. That happened in North Vietnam. I was a young boy, a little boy, and I heard it directly from the gentleman who told us the story. So, practice in such a way that the sound and image can bring about mindfulness and concentration.

(Bell)

If there is one who keeps the name of the bodhisattva in mind, even if he should fall into a great fire, the fire would be unable to burn him thanks to the imposing supernatural power of this bodhisattva.

In the verse it is like this. If there is one person who has the ill will to push you into a pit of fire, and if you know how to be mindful of the powerful energy of Avalokiteshvara, the pit of burning charcoal will become a cool lake. How can we understand this statement? If you are pushed into a pit of glowing ember, and if you know how to be mindful, how to practice the recollection of the powerful energy of Avalokiteshvara, then the pit of fire will be transformed into a cool lotus pond. In the prose, there is also another.....(long silence).....(I remember it like this because I memorized the Chinese texts. It’s harder to look into the English.....)..... If there is a person who is a victim of ignorance, that person who knows how to become mindful of the power of Avalokiteshvara will free himself of ignorance. If the person is caught in anger, and if she knows how to practice recollection mindfulness of the great energy of Avalokiteshvara, she will be free from her anger. If anyone is caught by his delusion, and if he knows how to practice mindfulness of the great strength of Avalokiteshvara, he will be free from that delusion. You have to understand all these verses in that spirit. The pit of burning charcoal, for those of us who are practitioners, represents anger.

Sometimes a whole nation is plunged into a pit of fire. Anger is on a national scale—anger and fear. Imagine how big is the pit of fire when the whole nation is plunged into anger. If you know how to be mindful of the symbol of compassion, you will calm yourself down. Mindfulness brings stillness and concentration. You can look more clearly and your anger will subside. That is what most Americans did not do after the September 11th event. The attack in New York triggered anger and despair and fear. It created a huge ocean of fire. The whole nation is plunged into that and acting on that. Acting on the ground of that emotion means that you do not practice mindfulness and recollection of Avalokiteshvara, the symbol of compassion and understanding.

I do not think that all Americans participate and share the same kind of feeling. I was in New York and I was in touch with friends who shared my insight that anger cannot respond to anger, and violence should not be used to respond to violence. We should be calm. We should practice looking deeply. We should see the situation clearly and we should act with wisdom and with compassion. There were many people who contacted me at that time—one day, two days, three days after the attack—and who agreed that America should stay calm, should be very careful

because that can trigger war. After one night, I decided to go on a fast and I wrote a letter asking my friends in Europe, America and everywhere to join me in the fast in order to practice calming and looking deeply. Many of them sent e-mails and informed us that they also started their fast. There were congressmen. There were politicians. There were others I contacted. They shared with me that we should not act out of anger. Many were ready to come to New York and support me in the talk I delivered at Riverside Church. Ambassador Andrew Young came and sat with me during many television interviews where I expressed myself. Politicians expressed their will to come and to support me—there were many of them—but finally they could not come because the feeling of anger was overwhelming. Most Americans were looking at the television screen and listening to their President express the willingness for revenge, for punishment. Many people who shared the same kind of insight did not have enough courage to speak out. Yet, 4,500 people came to the talk. 1,500 could not get in. They had to go home. My point is that not all Americans share the feeling and the viewpoint of their President. They know the value of calm, of serenity, of wisdom and of compassion. You have more friends with you than you may think. The wisdom is there. The compassion is there, but the environment was not favorable for the expression of that wisdom and compassion.

My message is very clear. All violence is injustice. We are capable of neutralizing anger and violence by compassion and loving kindness. When my talks in New York and Berkeley were recorded, that was the essential point of my message. The problem is this: finding yourself in such a situation, do you know how to practice in order to get maximum serenity and calm so that you will know the better way to solve the problem, not just acting out of anger and causing more suffering to your people and to the people on the so-called “other side”? Every violence done to them is done to yourself because we inter-are. The escalation of violence, of anger, will lead to destruction. This is clear.

We need Avalokiteshvara in many forms. The message of Jesus is love. Jesus Christ is Avalokiteshvara. “I am the door, that universal door. I am the gate. I am the path, the path of compassion, of reconciliation.” If Avalokiteshvara can manifest herself in many aspects, many forms, she can manifest herself in many names, also. We all have our Avalokiteshvara with different names and different forms. What is essential is that that name and that form can help us to calm down to make understanding and compassion possible, so that the pit of fire, the ocean of fire, vanishes and is replaced by a lotus pond. A lotus pond is inside and also outside. The talent of the Lotus Sutra is that it speaks to all kinds of people. If you belong to a popular brand of Buddhism, it speaks to you, but if you are deeply intellectual, deeply spiritual, it can also speak to you. That is the meaning of Universal Door.

You can understand this sentence textually, or you may understand it deeply as a practitioner. The ocean of fire, the ocean of suffering, of anger, is your reality. The suffering is enormous. The despair is enormous. The desire to punish, to make the other person suffer, is really there. All of that is helping the pit of fire to grow and grow and grow. So, how should we prepare for the cool lake, the lotus pond to come to us? Thanks to our practice—our practice of mindfulness of love, our concentration on love—understanding is the element that can make love possible. In my speech, I made it very easy, very simple. I said, “America is capable of making peace. There is enough wisdom and compassion in America. If you know how to make use of it, peace will be possible. If America is calm enough, she can see things more clearly and, by loving speech alone,

she can already transform the pit of fire into a lotus pond.” I suggested very concrete things for America to say.

If America can calm herself down, she will be able to say honestly, “Dear friend, you must have suffered a lot. You must have been very angry with us to have done such a thing to us. You have killed so many thousands of people. We don’t understand why. We want to understand why you hate us to that point, why you want to destroy us to that point. In fact, we don’t believe that we have done anything to make you suffer that much. But, we may have said things, we may have done things, that have given you the impression that we want to destroy you as a people, to destroy you as a religion. In fact, we don’t. We want to understand why you have done such a thing to us. We suffer very much and we know that you must have suffered a lot in order to have done such a thing. You have sacrificed your life, also, in order to do that. Please tell us of your suffering. We may be able to understand so that we will not do or say the things that can give you the impression that we want to destroy you, to make you suffer. We may even be able to do something to help you, because we know that if you do not have the conditions to live in safety and peace, then we will not have the conditions to live in safety and peace, because we share the same world.”

That kind of speech is loving speech. I think America is capable of using that speech. But, with a lot of fire inside, how can you honestly say that? You have to get the insight. You have to get the compassion in order to be able to utter words like that. Before America can do anything, if she can talk like that, using loving speech based on deep understanding and awareness of inter-being, the situation will change right away. If they suffer, we have to suffer also. If they don’t have hope, we don’t have hope. If they don’t feel safe, we don’t feel safe either. We inter-are. Having that kind of insight, you have enough compassion and calm and intelligence in order to express yourself in that way. Just a statement made by America can bring calm, because America is a world power. America is able to destroy and everyone knows that. But, America can behave like a good practitioner, like someone who knows how to listen and how to speak, with loving kindness.

I even went into more detail. I said that in order for people to believe you, you have to do that with your own people. You have to create a council of sages, and try to listen to the suffering of your own people, because there are so many people in America who believe that they are victims of discrimination and injustice. You can do it—not politically, but humanistically. There are those of us who have the power of listening and you should invite those of us who know how to listen in order to practice compassionate listening. You should invite portions of the population who believe that they are victims of discrimination and injustice. We create the kind of environment where they feel safe to express themselves. It may take several days or several weeks to tell you what is in their heart. A number of sessions of deep listening like that can relieve a lot of suffering already. People in the world will witness to that practice. “Ah! America is capable of listening to the suffering of her own people. How wonderful!” When you face them and you speak to them, they will believe you because you have demonstrated that you are capable of listening to the suffering of yourself, of your own people.

Out of my deep looking, I have offered a very concrete proposal. Many of my friends have listened, have approved. A number of people say that this is too idealistic. They never try things

like that. They only believe in the power of the gun. The practice of recollection of compassion is something we have to do to respond to a situation of fire, of anger. Anger goes along with delusion, the lack of understanding. That is why it is stated here in the sutra that if you are caught in a situation of anger, and if you know how to practice mindfulness of love, you will get freedom from that situation. If you are caught in a situation of delusion, and if you know how to practice the recollection of mindfulness of compassion, you can get out of that situation. It's very plain. It's very clear. That is the Universal Door.

We will continue tomorrow.

(Bell)

This talk was transcribed by Emily Whittle