

Buddhist Gospel of Reconciliation

Transcription of Dharma Talk by Thich Nhat Hanh

June 4th, 2002

[Opening Chants]

Good morning, Sangha. Today is June the 4th 2002 and we are in the Dharma Nectar Temple, Lower Hamlet, in our 21-day retreat. If you stay in the Upper Hamlet, you notice that there are two meditation halls. The big one is called Still Water Meditation Hall, and the small one is Transformation Hall, and in the small hall behind Transformation Hall, if you look up you see on the left over the door “I have arrived” and on the right “I am home”.

In the Vietnamese language there is no “I” and “you”. It’s funny, but it is true. When you want to tell your father something like, “Daddy, do you want me to make you a cup of tea?” then you have to say it in Vietnamese like this: “Would the father like his daughter to make him a cup of tea?” Or when you meet someone in the street, even if that someone is unknown to you, in order to address her or him you have to establish a kind of family relationship before you can talk. The person is at the age of your uncle and you would address him like this, “Would the uncle tell his nephew the way to the Post Office?” Or if that person is younger than you, at the age of your younger sister, and you say, “Would the younger sister show her big sister the way to the Post Office?” So “I” always means someone for the other person, a daughter, or a big brother, or an uncle to the other person. Everyone is in the family. “

So in the spirit everyone is a brother or a sister to each other, or an uncle or an aunt, and the whole society is a family. That is seen in the way people talk to each other. Everywhere you go you meet with members of your family, the family of humans. “Your child has arrived.” “Your child is home.” It sounds very sweet, very intimate. In Chinese there is a saying, “All men are brothers,” or, “People in the four oceans are brothers to each other.” It is the same spirit.

“I have arrived, I am home” is the practice, the basic practice, of Plum Village. It is the Dharma Seal of Plum Village. Any teaching, any practice, that contradicts the spirit of “I have arrived, I am home” is not the teaching and the practice of Plum Village. In the Buddhist tradition, we speak of the Three Dharma Seals. The Three Dharma Seals certify that these teachings and this practice are authentically Buddhist. The Three Dharma Seals are impermanence, non-self, and nirvana. Any kind of teaching, any teaching, any practice that does not reflect these Three Dharma Seals cannot be considered to be authentically Buddhist.

Some day we’ll have a chance to go back to the Three Dharma Seals, but today we only talk about the one Dharma Seal, the Dharma Seal of Plum Village: “I have arrived. I am home.” You can say that any teaching and any practice that does not reflect that, that contradicts the spirit of “I have arrived, I am home” is not from Plum Village. It would be very wonderful from time to time to ask ourselves that question: “Have I arrived? Am I home?” Your tendency is to run. We have been running all our lives. In our past lives and in this very life we continue to run, even during our sleep. We are still running and looking for something. We have not been able to stop.

The teaching of the Buddha is that life is available only in the here and now. If you are not capable of dwelling in the here and now you cannot be in touch with all the wonders of life that are available inside of you and around you. According to that teaching, the Pure Land, Nirvana, the Kingdom of God, is available in the here and the now. Because we keep running, that is why we are not in the position to get in touch with the Kingdom of God, the Pure Land of the Buddha, the foundation of our true being, Nirvana. That is why it is very important to learn how to stop, to establish ourselves in the present moment, in the here and the now, in order for touching life to become possible. When someone has arrived, when someone is home, you can see it. She is no longer in a hurry. She moves around very peacefully. She is a happy person. She is no longer running after something. That is why I have said that from time to time we should ask ourselves the question, “Have I arrived? Am I home?” That helps us to practice arriving and feeling at home.

When you sit, sit in such a way that you feel that you have already arrived. To sit doesn't mean to struggle. To sit means to enjoy your arrival. How wonderful to have arrived! How wonderful to feel that you are home, that your home—your true home—is in the here and the now. Those of us in this very sangha who are capable of arriving, of feeling at home, they radiate peace and joy.

When I entered the monastic community at the age of 16, I was given the practice right away. Every time I sat down, I should sit in such a way that I could arrive. There was a book of gathas, short poems, that I had to learn by heart. One gatha is for you to use when you sit down. “Sitting here is like sitting at the foot of the Bodhi tree to become a Buddha.” While you sit down there, you sit with mindfulness. You sit like a Buddha at the Bodhi tree and become a Buddha right away. Sit in such a way that sitting becomes a pleasure; sitting becomes an arrival. Everyone can sit like that if you memorize the gatha. When I was 16 the gatha was written in classical Chinese. I had to memorize the Chinese version. Now we have the Vietnamese version, the English version, the French version, and so on. “Sitting down here is like sitting at the foot of the Bodhi tree, fully in mindfulness, and I enjoy it.” You can write your own gatha in order for you to practice sitting in the present moment, sitting in the here and the now, sitting in order to be able to produce your full presence, in order to get in touch with the Kingdom of God, with the Pure Land of the Buddha, with our true nature. Sitting is a manifestation of your arrival. If you sit like that, joy and peace become a reality.

When you walk, you arrive at every step. You are no longer running, even if you are still walking. Every step brings you back to the here and the now for you to touch the wonders of life, touch the earth, to touch the sky, and to touch all the wonders of life. If you walk like that, the Kingdom of God, the Pure Land of Buddha, becomes available right away. The capacity of being in the here and the now makes everything possible.

When you have your lunch, when you take your lunch, you arrive at every moment. It's wonderful to feel you are surrounded by members of the Sangha. There is your body, of course, your physical body, but you have your Buddha body, you have your Dharma body, and you have your Sangha body. That is not something belonging to the future.

Actually, you do have your Buddha body. It means the capacity of being awake and fully present in the now. You have that body in you. You have to live with that body, not only with this physical body. You have your Dharma body. The Dharma is in you, the Dharma has been

transmitted to you, and you know how to calm, how to embrace, how to transform, how to be here and now, how to breathe, how to walk. Your Dharma body is there, available to you, so you have to live with your Dharma body. And the Sangha body—you have your Sangha body. During the time of eating, you enjoy your Sangha body. The stability, the solidity of your Sangha body helps you help your physical body to be stable, to be solid. You enjoy every moment of your lunch. You are nourished by the Sangha, the Dharma, and the Buddha. Each morsel of food that you chew, you chew thirty times, forty times, and you enjoy every moment because you practice arriving during the whole time of eating.

There are those of us who still continue to run during that time of eating. Eating breakfast, they don't really eat breakfast. They eat their projects. They eat their future. They think about what to do at the office and so on. So it's not eating breakfast. We should learn to eat our breakfast in such a way that we could arrive at any moment, every moment during breakfast time. We are available to us, we are available to our partner, to our children, to other members of the family. Breakfast time is a time of being together. You cannot do that unless you arrive, you are home, during the time of breakfast. Breakfast is a deep practice. Lunch is also a deep practice.

When you wash the dishes, you can make the dishwashing time into a session of practice. When you are standing there before the sink and you are enjoying every moment of your dishwashing, you can be in paradise. You can be in the Kingdom of God just enjoying washing the bowl. Washing each bowl is like giving the baby Buddha a bath. It's very holy. It's very spiritual. You enjoy every moment with the soap, with the warm water, with the dish, and you are in paradise. You are in the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is there at every moment, and this is possible.

That is why it is very important from time to time to ask the question, "Have I arrived? Am I still running? Am I feeling home?" If you truly have arrived, you enjoy the present moment, you enjoy the Pure Land, the Kingdom of God, then you radiate peace and joy. People around you will profit because they are exposed to your peace, your joy. You emit the light of mindfulness, of enlightenment, of insight, of happiness, and everyone in society will profit. There should be several of us like that, living like that, in society, and society will profit a lot from us. We do not seem to be doing anything. We just walk, we just sit, we just look, we just smile, we just eat our breakfast, and yet we are contributing a lot to the well-being of the world. That is the foundation of all kinds of action. That is the quality of being.

In the Sutra of 42 Sections, which was one of the earliest sutras translated into Chinese during the second century AD, in the Sutra of 42 Sections, there is one sentence: "The Dharma I offer, the practice I offer, is the practice of non-practice." When I was 16 I had the opportunity to learn that sutra already. It was quite difficult for a 16-year-old novice. My teaching, my Dharma, is to do the non-doing, to act the non-acting, to practice the non-practice, to practice the practice of non-practice, to act the act of non-acting. You see the repetition of the word "hanh". "Hanh" means "to act". "Hanh" means "action". You know my dharma name is "One Action"—"Nhat Hanh".

Acting the action of non-action. There are two things—action and non-action. When you say, "Don't just sit there, do something!" you are urging someone to act. If you are in a poor quality of being, if you don't have enough peace, enough understanding, enough inclusiveness, if

you still have a lot of anger and worries, then your action will have no value. Your action should be based on a foundation of being. Being is non-action. The quality of the action depends on the quality of being, and that is called non-action. Non-action is only something. There are those of us who do not seem to do very much, but their presence is very crucial for the well being of the world. In our family, maybe there is one who is not very active, who does not make a lot of money, but the absence of that person in the family would cause a lot of problems because that person is contributing non-action, the quality of being.

Imagine a boat crossing the ocean, a boat of refugees, and the boat is caught in a storm and everyone panics. You know that if everyone panics they will do the wrong things and the boat will turn over. If there is one person who is calm, who can inspire calm, and with his tranquility say, “Dear friends, stay where you are quietly,” that person doesn’t do anything. He just sits very calmly and his calmness inspires confidence and everyone follows, and he can save the whole boatload. That is not action; that is non-action. That is being. That is the ground of all good actions.

You have to look into action in order to see the ground of that action, which is the quality of being. There are many of us who keep trying to do things, but the more we do the more troubled our society becomes because the foundation of our being is not good enough. We are always trying to do something. That is why the problem of action and non-action should be considered.

Sometimes you don’t do anything, but you do a lot. Sometimes you do a lot, but you don’t do anything. You don’t help. There are many people who seem to be practicing a lot—sitting meditation twelve hours a day, twenty hours a day, reciting the sutras, evoking the name, but their anger doesn’t transform at all. Their anger, their frustration, their jealousy just remains the same. That is why the value of actions should be viewed in terms of the quality of being.

This sentence was given like that. Imagine a young novice, 16 years old. How could he understand that? My teaching, my Dharma is to take up the action of non-action, to practice the practice of non-practice, to attain the attainment of non-attainment. That helps us. That communicates to us that we should not be caught in the form. We should not discriminate between action and non-action, between being and acting. Sometimes you do a lot but you don’t help. That is why you should do the opposite. Don’t do anything. Improve your quality of being. That is the very meaning of the words, “Don’t just do something, be there. Sit there.” Sitting meditation is to improve our quality of being. We do that with the support of the sangha. Sitting, we don’t say anything to each other. We just sit and we feel each other and we support each other with our energy of being present. To be in the here and the now, solid, fully alive, is a very positive contribution to our situation.

That is why in the morning we sit together. We walk together. In the evening, we sit together. We walk together. We have lunch together. We don’t seem to have any discussion but we are growing as a sangha. We profit from each other. We profit from the quality of being of the others. We profit from the practice of each other. A good sangha is like that. We don’t need to talk a lot. We don’t need to communicate a lot verbally. You become an organism, and you continue to produce inside—brotherhood, sisterhood, compassion, and understanding. That is the most positive element that you can contribute to the world. That is the practice of non-practice. That is the attainment of non-attainment. That is the action of non-action.

“To act the action of non-action.” To practice the practice of non-practice. To attain the attainment of non-attainment. It is very much like the Heart Sutra, Prajnaparamita.

It can be said that the quality of our retreat lies in the fact that many of us are able to arrive. When you arrive you are quite different. You have peace. You have joy. You contribute a lot to the quality of the sangha. The teaching of the practice of arrival can become very deep when you consider it in the light of the ultimate dimension. There are many dimensions to reality. In the tradition based on the teaching and the practice of the Lotus Sutra, people speak of two dimensions—the ultimate dimension and the historical dimension. This sentence in the 42 Chapter Sutra will be fully understood with the teaching of the two dimensions.

The first dimension is called the historical dimension. [The second] is the ultimate dimension. Everything has the two dimensions. When you look at a wave on the surface of the ocean, you can see the form of the wave. We look at the wave in space and time. The historical dimension has to do with space and time. Space and time are not two separate entities. Space is made of time, and time is made of space. The word “historical” means time, and time includes space. The wave seems to have a beginning and an end. It is situated in time. That is why a wave should have a beginning and an end, a birth and death. The wave can be high or low. The wave can be this way or the other way. Many notions can be ascribed to the wave, like the notion of birth and dying, the notion of high and low, the notion of beginning and ending, the notion of coming and going, the notion of being and non-being. Being a wave you are subject to these notions because we are looking from the historical dimension. We see that being a wave you are subject to being and nonbeing. You are there but later on you will not be there. You are subject to have a beginning and to have an end. You have come from somewhere and you will go somewhere. That is the historical dimension. All of us belong to the historical dimension. Even when we speak of the Buddha Shakyamuni, or we speak of Jesus, we see that all of them have that historical dimension. Jesus was born in Bethlehem and he was crucified. The Buddha was born in Lumbini and he died in Kushinigara and it all belonged to the historical dimension. But they also have their ultimate dimension, like the wave. The wave, although it is a wave, is at the same time water. The wave doesn't have to die to become water. She is water right in the present moment, so the ultimate dimension of the wave can be touched. When speaking of water, you don't speak in terms of being and nonbeing, coming and going. You are talking about the wave. That is why we need these notions—the wave being there, and no longer being there. The wave has come from somewhere, and the wave has gone somewhere. The wave has a beginning, and the wave has an end. The wave can be high, low, more, or less beautiful than other waves. The wave can be this or that. The wave can have birth and death. But the wave possesses within herself the ultimate dimension: water. When she recognizes that she is water, she loses all her fear and she gets away from all these notions. Then you are able to touch your nature of no birth, no death, no coming, no going. You are no longer afraid of death. Our practice is like the practice of the wave. While living the life of a wave, we try to realize that we are also water and we should be able to live the life of water. That is the essence of the practice, because if we know our true nature of no coming, no going, no being, no nonbeing, no birth, no death, then we can dwell in the ultimate dimension, the Kingdom of God. Nirvana becomes available in the here and now. You don't need to die to touch Nirvana. It's like the wave. The wave does not have to die down in order to become water. She is water right now. We are dwelling in our true nature. We are dwelling all the time in Nirvana. That is a realization that the wave is the water. Our true nature is the nature of no beginning, no end, no coming, no going, no birth and no death.

When we speak of Jesus Christ, we speak of him as the son of man and the Son of God. The son of man is his historical dimension. The Son of God is his ultimate dimension. We all are like the Buddha. We are all like Jesus. We have our historical dimension, but we also have our ultimate dimension. Practicing deeply enough, we touch our ultimate dimension and we all lose our fear. The Lotus Sutra reveals to us that path of practice also.

In the ultimate dimension, we are already the water. The wave is already the water. In the ultimate dimension, we are already our true nature, the nature of no birth, no death. We are already Buddhas. In the historical dimension it seems there are things that we have to do. "I still have many things to do before I die." We speak like that because we are dwelling in the historical dimension. When I was in Holland last year a journalist came and asked, "Thay you are now over 70. What do you want to do before you die?" I didn't know how to answer her because she didn't have that background of practice and teaching. Really I don't feel that there is anything I have to do before I die because I don't see that I will die. I enjoy everything I do since I began the practice. I really didn't see that there is anything I have to do before I die. The things I want to do I have always been doing. In the context of ultimate dimension you cannot answer that question. How do you communicate that to her, a journalist who has not studied and practiced meditation? The best you can do is to smile, to look at her and smile.

In the historical dimension it seems there are things that you have to do, but in the ultimate dimension there is nothing to do. Non-action becomes understandable. I wrote when I was thirty: "The work of building will take ten thousands of lifetimes. But dear one, look! That work has been achieved ten thousand lives ago." [Vietnamese words] The work is the work of many lifetimes, but if you look deeply, that work has been achieved a thousand lifetimes ago. That is speaking in terms of the ultimate dimension. There is nothing for you to do. Enjoy! You are already in Nirvana. You are already a Buddha. The wave does not have to sit to become water. She is water right here and right now. What is essential is that she realize she is water. She doesn't have to go anywhere, to look for anything. That is the dimension of non-action. You don't have to do anything. You are already what you want to become.

A wave is willing to become water. She doesn't have to become water. She is water right now. Do you need to become a Buddha? Do you need to run after Nirvana, complete enlightenment? In the ultimate dimension you don't have to do anything. In the historical dimension, yes, it seems that there are things that you have to do—building a sangha, establishing a practice center, organizing a retreat. There's a lot of things to do. But if you realize that you are in that ultimate dimension, you do these things very relaxingly and joyfully, with no worries at all. You are acting very deeply but you act as if you don't act. You are very active, but everything you do comes from pure joy, pure achievement. That is what it means to be acting the non-acting action. You do everything, but you seem to be not doing anything at all. You are so relaxed. You enjoy every moment because you are acting out of non-action, from a base of non-action. You are not rushing. You are not running. I think many of us have some experience of this. Practice the practice of non-practice. There are those of us who practice with a lot of forms. We make people around us irritated because of our practice. We burn incense. We produce a lot of smoke. When we walk, we really practice. We become very irritating because we don't know the practice of non-practice. There are those of us who practice but no one knows that we are practicing. We just live our lives very joyfully, very beautifully.

You have got the dharma. You are very proud of the dharma that you learned. You are very proud of the practice that you have picked up. When you go home, by your practice you turn everyone off. They become irritated. They don't like your practice because you don't practice the practice of non-practice.

You do a lot, but you don't give the impression that you are not doing anything. You do things like breathing. By the time it is true action. If your actions are based on discrimination, you don't act out of the ultimate dimension from the ground of arrival, of being in your true home. Your action is not yet the kind of action that is needed. You act like you breathe. You do your daily things very active, but relaxed, happy, like you walk, like you breathe. That is true action.

In the Lotus Sutra there are many chapters that deal with the historical dimension, and there are chapters that deal with the ultimate dimension. During this retreat maybe two documents could be used for your pleasure of reading. If you don't read them it's okay, completely okay. The first is Old Path White Cloud, the life of the Buddha. It is very pleasant to read. We refer to the life of the Buddha because it tells us a lot about the way the Buddha acted. The Lotus Sutra tells us, also. The Lotus Sutra will reveal to us the two dimensions of reality, the historical dimension and the ultimate dimension. We can help to arrange so that the Lotus Sutra will become more beautiful. The way they arrange the chapters is not perfect. You should pick up the chapters dealing with the historical dimension and put them in the first half of the Sutra. You will take the chapters that deal with the ultimate dimension to make the second half of the Sutra. It's more logical. The Lotus Sutra has gone through a history of being reconstituted. That is the case of all Mahayana sutras. It takes a period of time for the Sutra to take the final form. During the time of the Buddha, the dharma talks are like that. There are Sutras that got their final form after having been delivered several times, like the Sutra on Mindful Breathing. The Buddha had given the teaching several times on how to practice Mindful Breathing. Then one day he gave a very full sutra on Mindful Breathing that has been handed down to us. That was a full moon night. He sat with his disciples outside and with the full moon he delivered a full speech on mindful breathing. So even during the time of the Buddha, there are many sutras on mindful breathing, but there is one that has the final form.

Mahayana sutras are like that also. There are many sutras belonging to the series of Prajnaparamita. There are texts that appear first, and then other texts follow. There's a very short text of the Prajnaparamita dealing with transcendental wisdom, emptiness, but there are longer and longer texts that come later. The final period is condensed text. The Heart Sutra is a very condensed form of the Prajnaparamita. There are only a few hundred words and we chant them every day. So all sutras, especially Mahayana sutras, had to undergo a time of building and finishing before they have their final version. The Lotus Sutra as it was handed down to us needs some more time in order to be fully organized. That is why my proposal is that you read the Lotus Sutra in that awareness, that a number of chapters should be classified in the historical dimension and a number of chapters should be classified in the ultimate dimension. You can enjoy doing that while you read the Sutra during the retreat or after the retreat.

I am sure that many of you have studied the Lotus Sutra, the Sutra on the Lotus of the Wonderful Dharma. That is a sutra of reconciliation. Those of you who have a Christian background are invited to reflect on the Sutra as a kind of gospel that you will be able to do the work of reconciliation. Yesterday I talked to you about the conflict between the new trend of

Buddhism, Mahayana, with the more conservative trend that is sometimes described as Hinayana, the Smaller Vehicle. Being too conservative, we prevent the tradition to grow, to bloom. The tradition should be a living tradition, capable of adapting to the new environment, capable of furnishing the answers to modern questions, capable of offering the kind of practice that can deal with the acts of suffering of our society. If you are too conservative, you prevent the growth of the tradition. You prevent the tradition from being creative in order to meet with the real needs of the people, especially the young generation. Any tradition has that kind of risk. If you are too conservative, then you stop the growth of your tradition. Many people don't feel at home with the tradition anymore. They want to run away, especially the younger generation. They abandon the church. They don't recognize the church as their home. They don't recognize the gospel as taught and practiced as something relevant to their lives. This is the feeling of many people in Christianity, in Judaism, in Buddhism, because the way they teach, the way they adjust the practice does not fit with our suffering, with our situation now. So many of us have left the tradition. But we know that it's our roots, so it's not without suffering that we have left the tradition. We always know that it is always our roots. So the way is to create a new gospel, but not from out of the blue, from the way you look into your roots and discover the things that are being prevented from manifesting. There are jewels in our own tradition that, because of that conservative attitude, have not had any chance to bloom, to manifest. Mahayana sutras are new gospels, attempting to reveal the best things in the tradition that have had no chance to manifest because of the conservative attitude of the monastic community.

Beginning with the Prajnaparamita, and with the Ratnakuta, you come to the Sutra called Ugradatta. Ugradatta is a lay person, an intellectual. That is the first layman that appears in a sutra as a leader, the first lay bodhisattva. In the Prajnaparamita and the Ratnakutha Sutras, many bodhisattvas have appeared, but as monastics. This is the first time a lay bodhisattva appears in the history of Buddhism. After a dharma talk given by the Buddha, so many lay people asked to become monastics. Ugradatta did not want to become a monastic. "It is possible for me to remain a lay person and practice and have the same kind of achievement as monastics", he said. It is possible to practice as a layperson and to become a Buddha. That is the confirmation of the Ugradatta Sutra. When the Vimalakirti Sutra came, another lay person appeared as a great bodhisattva, surpassing all other bodhisattvas. Vimalakirti is a lay bodhisattva, an excellent teacher, and no monastic bodhisattvas dared to confront him. In the Sutra, Vimalakirti pretended to be sick. One day in his house he said, "The compassionate Buddha, of course, knows that I am sick but he does not send someone to come and visit me." And the Buddha knew that, he heard that, and he said, "Shariputra, please go and visit the layperson Vimalakirti." And Shariputra said, "No, my lord, I am not able to meet with that person. He's too intelligent. He's wisdom surpasses mine. I don't dare to go there." He related to the Buddha stories of his encounters with Vimalakirti, and said, "No, no, I am not qualified to go and meet him. You send someone better." So the Buddha appointed another monk, and another monk, but everyone refused. No one dared to go and meet that lay bodhisattva. Finally, the Buddha had to send Manjushri, the crown prince of the dharma. When Manjushri accepted to go visit Vimalakirti at his home, everyone was excited. There would be an exciting exchange between the two bodhisattvas! Lay people and monastics all followed in order to be witness to that dialogue between the outstanding lay bodhisattva and the well-known and most outstanding Manjushri bodhisattva. The house of Vimalakirti was small. Tens of thousands of people followed Manjushri, so with his magical

power he made it possible for many tens of thousands of bodhisattvas and monastics can go into that house and everyone would feel comfortable in that house.

There is a book called Lay Bodhisattvas, Monastic Bodhisattvas that is to be published shortly in Vietnamese. If you want to translate it into English, please do! It tells the whole story of the encounter between these two big bodhisattvas and with the attendance of all these observers. The teaching and the dialogue in that is a kind of artillery, strong mortars directed to monasticism as an institution, directed against the conservative trend of Buddhism. The attack was merciless, and monastics were presented as having very small insight, very small wisdom, and very small liberation. Their Nirvana was very small.

I remember one time I was in the United States of America and I saw a book called Your God is Too Small. It's exactly the same thing. For the conservative trend, everything is small. That is why you have to create a new gospel. You have to put the tradition under attack. After you have succeeded, you will have produced the gospel of reconciliation, the Lotus Sutra. The Lotus Sutra did not come before Vimalakirti. This is the gospel of reconciliation. You can only produce the gospel of reconciliation after you have produced Vimalakirti who has put the conservative tradition under attack. Dualism, conservatism, fundamentalism—that is the word. I believe that there are Vimalakirtis in the Christian tradition now. They are firing their mortars. They are putting the tradition under attack. Producing the Vimalakirti gospel is very important before you can produce the gospel of the Lotus, the gospel of reconciliation.

In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha was surrounded by bodhisattvas and monastics. If you read the Lotus Sutra in the light of reconciliation, you understand the Sutra much more deeply. After the Buddha's parinirvana, the Buddha's passing away (speaking in terms of the historical dimension), after the passing away of the Buddha, people very much missed his presence, his personality, which is a refuge for the sangha. Before passing away, the Buddha repeated and repeated, "Please, my dear friends, don't take refuge in anyone. Take refuge in the island of self, Take refuge in the Dharma. Whoever can see the Dharma can see me." He commanded that. The Dharma is the Buddha. The Sangha is the Buddha. But still people miss his presence, his personality, and they envelop him under many mystical kinds of layers. They made Buddha into a god to worship, and they think that the Buddha is unique. The Buddha has lost his status as a human being. When you read Old Path White Cloud, you will notice that it is the intention of the author to help the Buddha renew himself as a human being again. When you read Old Path White Cloud, you are in touch with a human being called Buddha. He is more accessible to us than the Buddha who was created after his passing away.

The monastics' true name is Shravaka. They are direct disciples of the Buddha who receive the pratimoksha 250 precepts, and listen to the Buddha every day in order the practice. They are called disciples. Shravaka means those who listen to the Dharma, who have to learn the Dharma from the Buddha. That is the word used for monastics—Shravaka. The path of monastics is called the path of Shravaka, Shravakayana-- means "the sound", [Thây writes on the board] means "to listen". "To listen to the teaching of the Buddha" in order to practice—that is the monastic path.

There are those who are not direct disciples of the Buddha, who did not learn from the Buddha, but who know how to practice looking deeply into reality in terms of dependent co-arising. They then become a Buddha also, and they enjoy their emancipation. Alone they can

attain enlightenment. We call it ??????. ???? means Pratitya Samutpada, the principle of dependent origination. ??? means enlightenment. [writes on board] You get enlightenment thanks to looking deeply into the principle of dependent co-arising. This is the second path, called the pratyekabuddhayana.

According to the thinking and the practice of that time several hundred years after the Buddha's passing away, there is only one Buddha. There is only one person like Buddha. The feeling is that you cannot become a Buddha; you cannot be equal to a Buddha. The Buddha is unique. You cannot be a Buddha, and you don't need to be a Buddha. That is the thinking of the conservative trend. Remember, you cannot become a Buddha. You cannot be a Buddha. You do not need to become a Buddha, first of all, because the Buddha is too great. You don't have that mission. You don't have that need. That was the common feeling. So you are satisfied with a small path. You are satisfied with small Nirvana. You are satisfied with a small god, a small Kingdom of Heaven. When you look into the history of Buddhism, you understand the history of Christianity and Judaism. Your god is so small. Your paradise is so small. You are concerned only with your safety. You are only a creature. You don't share the holiness and the power of the Creator. You cannot be a Buddha—there is no way, and you don't need to become a Buddha. You have a lot of suffering, what you want is to stop suffering. That is plenty for you. Therefore your Nirvana is very small. Your ambition is very small. Your bodhicitta is not big at all.

Yet in the Buddhist gospel, the Buddhist canon, the Buddha has already confirmed that there are many Buddhas in the world. That is why Mahayana gospels, Mahayana sutras, are based on that and say that if Ugradatta can become a Buddha, we also can become a Buddha. All human beings can become a Buddha. Before that there is only one bodhisattva. When we speak of the word bodhisattva, we think right away of the former lives of the Buddha. Before becoming a Buddha, he was a bodhisattva. As there are many Buddhas, there must be many bodhisattvas, so the idea of a multitude of Buddhas brings about a multitude of bodhisattvas. Everyone has the Buddha nature, everyone can become a Buddha, and everyone is now a bodhisattva. Every one of us is a bodhisattva. That is why not only Vimalakirti can be a bodhisattva, Ugradata is a bodhisattva, but you and me—we are all bodhisattvas. There is a message of hope. There is a message of joy.

In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha confirmed that Shariputra can become a Buddha. After that everyone cheered and applauded! Whatever they had in their hand, they threw in the air! You cannot imagine the joy when the Buddha confirmed that Shariputra could become a Buddha. After that, he confirmed that all other disciples like Mogallana and the nuns could all become a Buddha. This is a very joyful ?????. Before that, monastics, Shravakas, had underestimated their wisdom, their insight, their nirvana. Everything was small. They had no capacity for confronting great bodhisattvas like Ogradata and Vimalakirti. So a Vimalakirti sutra, a Vimalakirti gospel, should be produced in order to bring the tradition out of its fundamentalism. When insight prevails, you will produce the Lotus Sutra, the Gospel of Reconciliation. This is a real Gospel of Reconciliation, where the Buddha embraced monastics and lay people tenderly in his two arms. This is a very happy Sutra. The Lotus is considered to be the king of the sutras of Mahayana. That's not because it contains very deep, deep ideas, but because of its effect of reconciliation, this power of reconciliation. It's wonderful! The Lotus Sutra. In our 21 day retreat we will come back to the Sutra always.

The new image, the new yana, is proposed. The path is not the path of a monastic only thinking of her own emancipation and her small nirvana. The path is not the path of a lone Buddha, but the path is the path of a bodhisattva, bodhisattvayana. First of all, the bodhisattvayana is considered to be the only authentic yana, the only authentic path. The other path is not a real Buddhist path. A bodhisattva is an authentic child of the Buddha. The Shravakas and the pratyeka Buddhas are not really authentic children of the Buddha. Like a king, when the king lives with the queen and produces a child that is a prince or princess, that is an authentic child of the king. If the king slept with someone who is not the queen, then that is not an authentic prince or princess. If you are a monastic following the Shravaka tradition, you are not a real child of the Buddha. I am a bodhisattva, therefore I am an authentic child of the Buddha. My practice is for everyone. I'm engaged. My practice is really engaged in society, dealing with the actual sufferings of mankind. If your practice only aims at helping you to suffer less, and to hide yourself in your small nirvana, you are not a real child of the Buddha. That is what the Mahayana sutras express. When the Lotus Sutra came, it is a gospel of reconciliation. That is why it is said in the Sutra that Shravaka is also an authentic child of the Buddha, and Pratyeka buddha also, and bodhisattva also. We have to hold hands with each other. In the beginning, the Buddha taught that the distinction into the three paths, the three yanas, is a necessity because there are people of different kinds of mentalities and ambitions. That is why the Buddha had to propose the three paths. But in fact there is one path. Finally everyone has to follow the bodhisattva line. Three yana is a kind of skillful means proposed by the Buddha. In fact there is only one yana. That is the path of the bodhisattva.

How to Mahayanize the Shravaka path? How to Mahaynize Pratyeka Buddha. That is the effort of Mahayana Buddhism. Finally everyone sees that they belong to the same family and the reconciliation is obtained. I would say that the Lotus Sutra is the gospel of reconciliation. It brought a lot of happiness. It made the tradition into a family again. Lay bodhisattvas and monastic bodhisattvas are working hand in hand on the path.

There is a chapter that is considered to be very important in the Lotus Sutra, and that is the chapter called Upaya, Skillful Means. In fact there is only one path, but because of skillful means, the Buddha has proposed three yanas, but in fact there is only one. Three yana is skillful means. In fact there is only Ekayana, one path. The unitary path, the bodhisattva path, and every monastic, every Shravaka, should become a bodhisattva, because the Buddha was a bodhisattva.

This is a translation Scriptures of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma: the Lotus Sutra. That chapter is Chapter 2, Expedient Devices. You can call it Skillful Means. The Sanskrit word is Upaya To present the path as having three branches is only skillful means. Ultimately there is only one path, the bodhisattva one. That's the core of the meaning of the second chapter.

The scenery of the Lotus Sutra is the Gridakuta Mountain. Many of you have visited the Gridakuta Mountain. It can accomodate 500 bodhisattvas on the mountain at the most, but in the Lotus Sutra tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of bodhisattvas can be there. Sometimes bodhisattvas stay in the air! Countless of them coming from many, many directions. The Mahayana Sutras, like Vimalakirti and Lotus Sutra are presented like theater scenes, and each chapter is an act where the actors are bodhisattvas, buddhas, and shravakas. It is very beautiful because at that time India was very fond of theater. Ramayana and all these kinds of dramas were very much appreciated. That is why the sutras are presented in such an appealing way so each chapter is a real act of the theater. I would suggest that when the attention is focused on the

ground of the mountain, you are in the historical dimension. But when your attention is focused in the air, that means you are in the ultimate dimension. In this sutra, sometimes the Buddha appears in the historical dimension, but sometimes he appears in his ultimate dimension. His disciples, who were used to seeing him in the historical dimension, were very surprised to see him in the ultimate dimension.

At one point in the Sutra, while the Buddha was giving a teaching of one path, the unique path, suddenly in the air there was music, there is a sound, a very fine sound. Some say, "Wonderful! Shakyamuni, you are teaching the Lotus Sutra! How wonderful!" and everyone looked up and got in touch with the ultimate dimension. There is a beautiful stupa in the sky, adorned with several kinds of jewels. From within the stupa a very beautiful voice came out, "Wonderful, Shakyamuni, you are teaching the Lotus Sutra showing that there is only one path and not three paths!" Everyone asked the Buddha, "Who is that? Who is that?" Everyone turned to the historical teacher. Shakyamuni Buddha smiled and said, "That is a buddha. His name is Dabow???. While he was teaching in his assembly he made the vow that anywhere at any time in the future, if a buddha appears teaching the Lotus Sutra he would make himself available and present in order to utter words of compliment." Apparition of the Jewelled Stupa—that is Chapter 11. Remember the second chapter is Skillful Means. This is the 11th Chapter. Apparition of the Jewelled Stupa. Stupa means "pagoda". The name of the buddha is Prabhutaratna, the buddha who was in the stupa and uttering the words of praise. That is a buddha who has made a vow to manifest himself anytime anywhere a buddha appears and delivers the teaching of the one yana, the one path. When all the disciples of the Buddha learned about that buddha, Prabhutaratna, everyone wanted to see that buddha. Everyone wanted to see the buddha of the ultimate dimension. Their Buddha, Shakyamuni, was a buddha of the historical dimension. Now they wanted to see the buddha that is a buddha of the ultimate dimension, the buddha that is not conditioned by birth and death.

Everyone turned to Shakyamuni and said, "Be a teacher. Help us to see the buddha sitting inside of the stupa. You have a lot of power. Can you use your magical power to open the door of the stupa so that we can see the ultimate buddha inside?" The Buddha said, "It's a little bit difficult, but I will try." The teacher always had a lot of love for his disciples. He tried to do everything in order to satisfy the requests of the disciples. "It is possible to open the door of the stupa with the condition that I call back all of my transformation bodies, and I am doing that right now." The Buddha, using his concentration, emitted a ray from his forehead. With that ray he touched the ten directions, calling his transformation bodies to come home in order to be able to open the door of the ultimate. Before that, all the disciples thought that their teacher was the physical body sitting in the Gridakuta Mountain. They didn't know that the Buddha is everywhere. He has transformation bodies everywhere, teaching everywhere. He's not only there. He's everywhere in the cosmos. You have not seen your teacher in his ultimate dimension. You have seen him only in his physical dimension. You think that it is him, but it's not really him, because that is only one of his transformation bodies. If we look deeply into ourselves, we see that we have many transformation bodies also. Not only Shakyamuni has many transformation bodies that are acting everywhere in the cosmos. We are like that also.

I feel that now at this very time I am in my home country. I am helping with the young monastics and the lay people over there. I feel I am present there. My books and tapes have been brought to Viet Nam. We don't know how, but people there enjoy the teaching and the practice.

There are friends from Australia and Holland who visit Viet Nam, and they have come back and reported that I am truly present in Viet Nam. So I have many transformation bodies in Viet Nam. I have transformation bodies in the prisons in England, in the United States, and in other countries because my teachings have been able to penetrate into the prisons. There are many prisoners who are practicing walking meditation and sitting meditation in prisons. I really have manifestation bodies a little bit everywhere. If you have the eyes of sightlessness not caught by opulence you recognize me outside of this body.

All of us have many transformation bodies. We are acting, we are being, everywhere. So with concentration the Buddha emitted a light and touched the ten directions and he called all his transformation bodies to come back. That was the one condition for opening the stupa. Now the mind of his disciples began to open and they were no longer attached to the idea that this was their teacher. This was a very tiny manifestation of their teacher. Their teacher is everywhere in time and space, and has so many manifestation bodies. For the first time they began to see their real teacher. Before that they thought their teacher was conditioned by coming and going, being and nonbeing, here and there, but in fact they had not really seen their teacher. Not being able to see their teacher, how could they see themselves? From the historical dimension you come to the ultimate dimension. The door is open.

When all the transformation bodies of Shakyamuni were there, Shakyamuni just clapped, and the door of the stupa opened. All the bodhisattvas and the devas who were on that level could see him very clearly, but all those of us Shravakas who were on the mountain were too low. We looked up like this, but we couldn't see the buddha sitting there. We don't know what to do so we turned to our teacher, "Dear teacher, can you lift us up a little bit so that we can see the buddha inside the stupa?" And Shakyamuni said, "Okay, I will try." Using his magical power he lifted everyone up to the level where they can look into the stupa and see the ultimate buddha, Prabhutaratna. Prabhutaratna is smiling. He continues, "Shakyamuni, it is wonderful that you are now teaching the Lotus Sutra!" and he made room on his lion seat and he invited Shakyamuni to come and sit with him. It's a very wonderful way of showing the teaching, you see? The ultimate buddha and the historical buddha sitting together become one. Only when you know how to read the Sutra in that way can you really understand the Lotus Sutra. Imagine Prabhutaratna sitting there and making room for the historical Buddha Shakyamuni to come and sit. The two Buddhas sitting—are there one Buddha or are there different Buddhas? If you don't transcend the idea of same and different, how can you touch the ultimate dimension? It's so wonderful! There are many chapters in the Lotus Sutra like that which introduce us to the ultimate dimension. In the ultimate dimension there is nothing to do anymore. You are already a Buddha. You are already what you want to become, so relax. Arrive. Don't run anymore. How can you live deeply in your historical dimension if you don't touch that ultimate dimension? Once you have touched your ultimate dimension, you become relaxed. You do everything but relaxingly and happily without worries. That is the ultimate dimension.

I would like to make a modest contribution to the Lotus Sutra. I want to add another dimension. I want to select a few chapters in the Lotus Sutra and classify them into a third division of the Sutra which I call the division of the Action Dimension. First you have the Ultimate Dimension where you don't have to do anything—very nice! It's very nice to be in the ultimate dimension. We should learn how to do it. Then you have the historical dimension. How can we help people to touch the ultimate dimension in order for them to live happily, relaxingly

in the historical dimension. How to help people who suffer in the historical dimension to touch the ultimate dimension so that they can stop suffering because of their fear, their despair, their worries. Without touching the ultimate dimension you still have worries and fear. How to bring the ultimate dimension to the historical dimension? How to bring the historical dimension to the ultimate dimension?

You need another dimension called the dimension of action, the Action Dimension. There are already in the Lotus Sutra a number of chapters that can be classified into the third division of the Sutra, the chapters on bodhisattvas who are always acting in order to bring people to the ultimate dimension. In the Lotus Sutra, there are chapters describing the practice and action of bodhisattvas. All these chapters can be classified into the third division, the dimension of action.

In chapter 20, you see a bodhisattva called Sadaparibhuta, translated as “the bodhisattva that will never despise you, that will never underestimate you, that will never disparage you”. The action of that bodhisattva is to remove the complex of worthlessness in people, low self-esteem. How can I become a buddha? How can I get enlightened? How can I transform suffering? I am nothing but suffering. There is nothing in me except suffering. I am worthless. Many people have that kind of complex, and they get sick because of that complex. The action of this bodhisattva is to persuade him or persuade her that she is not like that. She is a wonder of life. She can achieve what a buddha can achieve. It is a message of hope, a message of confidence. That is a bodhisattva acting in the third dimension. Without the third dimension, how can we bring the historical dimension back to the ultimate dimension? How can we introduce the ultimate dimension into our daily historical life? That is why together we should rearrange the Lotus Sutra. The first division is the historical dimension, the second division is the ultimate dimension, and the third division is on the action dimension.

Under Chapter 23 we have another bodhisattva called Bhaishajyaraja, the King of Medicine. We still have other chapters dealing with the action of all bodhisattvas. They are all arms of the Buddha. All these chapters should be classified under the name of action dimension.

We will come back to these chapters in order to see how the arm of the Buddha, the hand of the Buddha is acting. For the time being we should be satisfied with the idea that the dimension of action is the kind of energy helping us to bring the ultimate dimension into the historical dimension so that we can live our life of action in a relaxing and joyful way, free from fear, free from stress, free from despair. The title of our retreat, the theme of our retreat (there are calligraphers in the Sangha who write in Chinese). Six words [Thây pronounces them in Chinese] This is in a chant. In every monastery in Viet Nam and China and Japan, we chant this every morning.

“Opening the door of action.” This is the hand of Buddha. The door of action, which is the six paramitas. Bodhisattvas are acting in the spirit of the six paramitas. The six paramitas will be the object of our studies and practice during this retreat. That is a concrete action. Everyone of us should be a bodhisattva and putting into practice the six paramitas in order to build sanghas, to provide our society with refuge, to bring the ultimate dimension into the historical dimension so that we can arrive, we can be relaxed, we can be joyful. We can stop. We can make peace and enjoyment possible for humankind and for other species on earth also. Everyone should be a bodhisattva. Everyone should be practicing the six paramitas. Everyone should be able to enjoy

the ultimate dimension. In the Mahayana tradition, every one of us becomes a cell of the Buddha. And the Buddha will take a new form—Sangha.

This talk was transcribed by Joan Ging