

HOLY SANGHA

June 8, 2002
Hand of the Buddha Retreat
Plum Village

Chant: We Are Truly Present

*With hearts established in mindfulness, we are truly present.
For sitting and walking meditation, and for reciting the sutras
May this practice center with its four-fold Sangha
Be supported by the three jewels and holy beings.
While protected from the eight misfortunes and the three paths of suffering.
May parents, teachers, friends, and all beings within the three realms
Be filled with the most divine grace.
And may it be found that in the world there is no place at war.
May the winds be favorable, the rain seasonable, and the people's hearts at peace.
May the practice of the noble community, diligent and steady,
Ascend the ten bodhisattva stages with ease and energy.
May the Sangha body live peacefully, fresh and full of joy,
A refuge for all, offering happiness and insight.*

*The wisdom of the Awakened mind shines out like the full moon
The body of the Awakened One is pure and clear as crystal.
In the world The Awakened One relieves bitterness and suffering.
In every place the Awakened mind reveals love and compassion.
Namo Sakyamunaye Buddhaya*

Good morning dear Sangha, today is June the 8th 2002 and we are in the Loving Kindness temple, Plum Village, during our twenty-one day retreat. I wish that all of you learn and practice the chant The Four Recollections. It is available in the *Chanting Book*. The music and words are available in English. A new edition of the *Plum Village Chanting Book* will carry this chant, also with a new version of the Heart Sutra. The Four Recollections is the recollection of the Buddha, the recollection of the Dharma, the recollection of the Sangha, and the recollection of the Five Mindfulness Trainings. The Mindfulness Trainings. Not only the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha are our refuge, but the Mindfulness Trainings are also our refuge. And we should be able to chant this in our community and in our family as well. And the other day the monastic Sangha chanted it for us. It goes like this: *Practicing the teaching the noble community in which I take refuge is the community that goes in the direction of goodness, in the direction of truth, in the direction of beauty, in the direction of righteousness. It is the community that is composed of four pairs and eight kinds of holy people. It is the community that is worthy of offering, worthy of great respect, worthy of admiration, worthy of salutation. It is the community standing upon the highest field of merit in all of the world.*

We need some explanation in order to understand fully the third recollection, the recollection on the Sangha. But there is a sentence that I would like to speak to you this morning:

It is the community that is composed of four pairs and eight kinds of holy people. Because a real Sangha should be a Sangha, a true Sangha should be a Sangha where the element of holiness exists. We used to refer to the Pope as his holiness, and to the Dalai Lama as his holiness, but we do not know whether the element of holiness can be in us. Anyway, the element of holiness should be there in a Sangha in order for the Sangha to be a real one. And what is the element of holiness? What makes the Sangha holy is the presence of the Buddha in the Sangha, the presence of the Dharma in the Sangha, and the presence of the Mindfulness Trainings in the Sangha.

In our first Dharma talk we have described the Six Togethernesses that make a true Sangha possible. And the Second Togetherness is practicing the same Mindfulness Trainings. What if people in the Sangha do not practice Mindfulness Trainings? It cannot be a holy assembly at all, the Sangha. It is because of the fact that everyone in the Sangha practices mindfulness, the Mindfulness Trainings, that the Sangha can become a holy community. Because in the Mindfulness Trainings there is the Buddha, there is also the Dharma. And that is why it is very important to remind ourselves that the practice of mindfulness made concrete by the Trainings—the Five Trainings, the Fourteen Trainings, the Ten Trainings, the 250 Trainings—very concrete, it makes the Sangha holy and not something else.

When you practice mindful walking, you produce the element of holiness because in mindfulness there is a concentration and the concentration always brings about insight. And holiness is something you can produce with each step you make. If you come to a community and if you feel that there is the element of holiness in it because members of the community are practicing mindfulness, this is sure. And every one of us—whether we are young or less young or man or woman—it is possible to produce the element of holiness in our daily life. Every time you look at something with mindfulness, every time you smile with mindfulness, you produce the element of holiness. Because mindfulness is the capacity of being there fully present, fully alive and touching deeply life.

It is like the Holy Spirit, when the Holy Spirit is there life is possible and God is present. In the expression Holy Spirit there is the word holy which is the element of holiness. And we don't have to seek for holiness elsewhere, because there is a seed of mindfulness in all of us and every time we touch the seed and that seed becomes an energy of mindfulness guiding our words, guiding our thought, guiding our actions, and then we are producing the element of holiness every minute, every second. Let us not have any complex: we can be holy. And when I look at my disciples I see many of them have the element of holiness in them, the way they walk, the way they breathe, the way they look at each other, the way they do things silently and in mindfulness, expresses the element of holiness in their lives. So every practitioner can be addressed as his or her holiness, there is no doubt about it. If I respect the Sangha, I revere the Sangha, if I look upon members of Sangha with respect because I see the element of holiness in them. Even if they are still very young practitioners they are capable of producing holiness. And if we bring the element of holiness into our daily lives, we will change the world. Because the collective holiness of Sangha can embrace, can transform, and can bring about insight and transformation into the world.

It is the community that is composed of four pairs and eight kinds of holy people. There are four pairs of holy people, and four pairs are eight kinds. And in this assembly there are holy

people, and you can recognize them in the four pairs. For me holiness is something real, something daily. When you eat your lunch mindfully, joyfully, fully alive, the element of holiness is there, generated from your being and your eating. And combined with the element of holiness generated by other members of the Sangha you have the atmosphere of holiness. And when people touch that atmosphere of holiness they are transformed.

The first pair of holy people are the people who are on their way to enter the stream, or accurately, in the stream we call it stream-entrance. The Sangha is like a stream, is like a river, or if you want, it is like the TGV, the train of great *vitesse*. It can carry many, many people to a kind of destination. If you board the TGV in Bordeaux, you can arrive in Paris. If you identify with a river and you go with the river, you will certainly arrive at the ocean. There is a stream. There is a path. There is an orientation. And those of us who are proceeding to the stream—you are not in the stream yet but you are heading to the stream. You are not on the TGV yet, but you are in the taxi going to the station. And that is the first kind of holy people already because you know where you need to go. You are joining the Sangha. You are joining the stream that will lead you to the ocean. And that is a big event. You have made an important turn in your life. You are going in the direction of the stream. Although you are not yet in the stream, but you are going to it. That is the first accomplishment. You are concentrated; know where you go. That is the first fruition.

This is the first pair: someone who is heading toward the stream, and someone who is already in the stream. If you are already a drop of water, if you have become the river then surely, certainly you will arrive at the ocean. If you have climb into the TGV then surely you will arrive in Paris. And this is the first pair of holy people. You are going to join the stream or you are already in the stream—you belong to the first pair of holy people. That is why do not have any complex. The element of holiness is in you. You know where to go. You know your path. Having a path is wonderful. Having a path, seeing the path, is already great happiness. You have seen the path. There is no reason why you have to be fearful anymore; there is no reason why you are confused anymore. For those of us who do not know where to go, we suffer terribly. We get lost. There is a lot of confusion. We don't know who we are and what we want to do. But once we have recognized the path, we know that we have a path and happiness becomes possible already. That is why seeing the path is the first element of holiness. And if you have seen the path you belong to one of the eight kinds of holy people. Because the path is already in you.

When Jesus said, "I am the door. I am the way," he means I have the element of holiness in me, you can count on that element. It can be helpful to you because you take refuge in me. And also you can become the door. You can become the path. I am the way. When you see the way, you become the way. And the element of holiness begins to be in you. And when you feel you are on the path you know that surely you will arrive. And you are called a stream-enterer. And the fruition that you have attained is stream-entrance. And that is why I said with a lot of conviction that in this assembly there are many of us who have the element of holiness within themselves. And that element of holiness makes them happy. Holiness here is not a title; it is the substance, the real substance that makes you happy. You know where you go and you know that you are on the right path. That is great happiness.

The second pair is called “once-returner.” After some time of practice you have the impression that you only need to come back once, only once, in order to finish the whole business of entanglement and suffering. You are going to be emancipated from all of that. You can get away from it all. This is the last time—you have to go back just once and finally you get rid of this kind of entanglement. And there are those of us who are going into this position and there are those of us who are already in that position—the second pair—I have to return to this environment of suffering just once more, and after that it is finished. And that is the second fruition. So those of us who are on the way to reach that belong to the third category. And all of us who are already in that fruition we are in the fourth category. We belong to the second pair of holy people.

This means oriented toward it. And this is the fruit you have already attained. This means oriented toward and here is the fruition. So every pair has the orientation towards and the attainment. And in this assembly there are those of us who on the path of attaining the second fruition. And there are those of us who know that we only have to come back once and after that, finished.

And the third pair is “no-returning.” We know that we will not have to return to that state of being any more. No returning. And no returning is a pair. Either you are on the path to obtain the fruit, the fruition, or you have already attained the fruition. The word (*Vietnamese*) means fruit. It’s was this kind drawing. This is the fruit and becomes this. This comes from this design. A fruit. (Draws Chinese character.)

And the fourth is “arhat.” The Buddha is an arhat. The Buddha is also a bodhisattva, but his foundation is arhatship, completely released. The word arhat, it has so many meanings. The first meaning is worthy of offering. A being that is worthy of your respect, of your salutation, of your offering. You become a kind of fertile field where people can come and plant the seeds. And they are sure if they plant the seeds in that fertile field they will reap many, many good things. It’s the field of merits. When you become an arhat, you become a field of merits where people can plant the good seeds and surely they will reap very wonderful things for themselves. The second meaning is you have won a victory over the afflictions—craving, delusion—you have won the battle over, you have destroyed all these kind of afflictions, you are free. (*Vietnamese*) is worthy of offering. You have already killed the afflictions. You have already uprooted affliction in you. That is an arhat. And there are those of us who are on the path, on the way to arhatship. There are those of us who are already arhats. So that is the fourth pair. So now you know the meaning of the words: it is the community that is composed of four pairs and eight kinds of holy people.

And we know that the practice of mindfulness made concrete by the trainings, the practice of mindfulness done in our daily life brings concentration, insight, and liberation. And that is the very base of the element of holiness. And it is possible for us to generate the element of holiness in our daily life. You are a mother; you can be a holy mother. You are a father; you can be a holy father. The holy father is not only the Pope. Your teacher can be a holy person. You, the student, you can be a holy person also if you have the elements of mindfulness, concentration, and insight in you. And you know very well that you are able to be mindful, you are able to be concentrated, you are able to have insight that can liberate you. And that is the

Buddha nature in us, not some abstract idea but a reality. Buddha nature is what we all have. If you think of the Holy spirit in that spirit, we know that the Holy Spirit is not something coming from the outside only. The Holy Spirit can be generated by our daily life, by the way we drink our tea, by the way we look at another person. If our look has compassion and understanding, then our look has the element of holiness in it, then our look is empowered by the holy Spirit. So it is possible to invite or to help the Holy Spirit to manifest. You may used to saying, "I would like to invite the Holy Spirit to be in me," but you may like to speak it differently: "I would like to generate the element Holy Spirit so it can manifest from me." Because everyone has the seed of holiness, of mindfulness within him or her. And according to the Buddhist teaching on psychology, we all have the Buddha nature as a seed. We all have mindfulness, concentration, and insight as seeds in our store consciousness, so every time you go back and touch them, they manifest.

So it's not from outside, it's not from inside, it's everywhere. We should see the elements of, the seeds of holiness, the seed of concentration, the seed of insight as being there and available to us at anytime. The time when we touch them they will manifest as wonderful energies, and we will be guided by them. We will be protected by them. And if one person can generate the element of holiness, then a Sangha can also generate a very powerful element of holiness. And this it how it works in our personal situation, and in the situation of our family and our society.

Bell.

When we have confusion and pain within ourselves there are two options: Either we allow the confusion and the pain to take hold of us, to overwhelm us, or we practice in order for the energy of holiness, the energy of mindfulness, concentration to be generated in order to embrace and recognize the pain and the delusion in us. So you have two options: You chose to be just a victim of your delusion, of your pain, or you chose to generate the Holy Spirit, to generate mindfulness in order to recognize and embrace tenderly your pain and your delusion. In the second case, you are a practitioner, and you can be supported by brothers and sisters in your Sangha. You can be supported by your teacher. Because mindfulness is the kind of energy that can recognize the pain, the suffering, in you, the difficulties in you. And if you know how to embrace tenderly your pain and suffering, if you know how to generate that energy of mindfulness and make it powerful then you'll be able, it will be able to recognize, embrace the pain, the suffering, and the difficulty in you. And if you do it long enough, there will be a relief, and there will be a transformation.

When you plant something in the soil. When you plant a seed of sunflower in the soil, the soil embraces the seed. The soil continues to embrace the seed day and night, and because of that the seed can sprout and become a tiny plant. The energy of mindfulness and concentration, it is like the earth. If you allow that energy which is holy to recognize and to embrace tenderly your delusion, your suffering, your pain, then something will happen. Understanding of suffering, and transformation of suffering will become possible. That is on the personal level. When you are encouraged to practice with a Sangha not only as an individual, because the energy of a Sangha is formidable, is powerful. Why not allow the collective energy of the Sangha to embrace your pain? You will have your personal energy of mindfulness and concentration, but you can very

well profit from the powerful, the wonderful collective energy of the Sangha. And the Sangha is there, ready to embrace your pain, to recognize your pain. And you will see, the Sangha will be like a boat. And if you allow the Sangha to embrace you to transport you, if you allow the Sangha to embrace your pain, you will not sink into the river of suffering anymore, you'll float. You'll survive very easily if you surrender to the Sangha. "Dear Sangha, this is my pain, this is my difficulty. Please be aware of that, please embrace it. I need my Sangha."

If the world is a Sangha, then the pain and the suffering of the Middle East should be the object of its embrace. How for the whole family, the whole human family, become aware of the suffering? How for the whole human family to embrace tenderly that suffering in the Middle East? And that continued awareness and concentration will bring about the insight that can alleviate the suffering and transformation of the suffering. Because when we hold our suffering in mindfulness we will come to an understanding of the nature of the suffering. We will have the insight as what to do in order to bring an end to the suffering. But as it is now, humanity is not a Sangha yet. We don't have enough mindfulness; we don't have enough concentration. We are not in a position to embrace the Middle East with all our concentration. We are too dispersed. We are thinking about one million things at the same time. The human family is not a Sangha yet. That is a reality. We are concerned about our own interests, our own craving. That is why we pay very little attention, very little mindfulness, concentration to the suffering of the Middle East.

So when, if, you have the fortune of having a Sangha you should allow the practice to be in the Sangha scale. Don't consider your suffering to be something that belongs only to you. You come to your Sangha and you say, "Dear Sangha, this is my pain, this is my suffering. I need the Sangha to be aware and to embrace my suffering." And then during the sitting, during the walking, during the eating, the Sangha will embrace your suffering tenderly, and you feel relief right away. Right away, because you are no longer locked into your so-called self. You have opened up yourself; you have become a Sangha. And the moment when you become the Sangha, you trust the Sangha, you surrender to the Sangha, your afflictions begin to dissolve. Before the Sangha does something your suffering is dissolved. This is a wonderful thing. This is a very drastic change already. Taking refuge in the Sangha is a very deep practice. You trust the Sangha. You become the Sangha.

If you are a drop of water, you may wonder whether you have the capacity of going to the ocean or not. But when you become a river, you are sure you don't have to worry, you will certainly come to the ocean. The problem is you that you still want to be drop of water. Or you want to become a river that solves the problem. And that is the real meaning of taking refuge in Sangha, becoming the Sangha, consider the Sangha body as your body. And many of us in Plum Village try to practice like that. We don't want to be a drop of water. We want to be a river. And by practicing becoming a river we suffer much less. Individual suffering can be transformed very easily when we share the concern of the Sangha, the happiness of the Sangha, the dedication of the Sangha. And that is why when we come and sit together, when we come and walk together, when we come and eat together and work together, there is powerful energy in us. That energy is the energy of mindfulness that is embracing the pain, looking deeply into the pain in order for us to understand the pain and to have the kind of insight that will lead to the transformation of the

pain. On the individual level, your deepest concern becomes the object of your practice, of your mindfulness.

Disk 2

In the Zen circle there is a practice of *kung an*, in Japanese, koan. This is a deepest concern. The koan should be something that you are deeply interested in—your deepest concern. You want to understand. You want to transform. It is like when you are struck by an arrow, and you carry the arrow with you in your flesh. Standing or sitting, being awake or sleeping, you still carry the arrow. The koan should be something like that. Your daily life is fully focused on that. And the koan should be something that can draw all your energy, your interest, your mindfulness, your concentration on it. And you are holding it day and night, embracing it, looking deeply into it. And one day insight will come, and you'll understand, and you'll be liberated. So koan is something that should have the capacity of bringing all your concentration, all your energy into it, because without that there cannot be a breakthrough.

The suffering in the Middle East, for instance, is a koan for the whole mankind. Not only for the Israelis or the Palestinians. But as a human family we are so busy, we are not a Sangha. We don't have enough mindfulness, concentration. We cannot make it into a koan. We pay some attention, and then we remove attention, we focus attention on other matters. And that is why it is not a koan for the human family yet.

When the teacher understands the difficulties and the suffering of the disciples, he or she will offer a koan, like, "Tell me dear one, what is the sound made by just one hand? Usually you need two hands in order to make a sound. Tell me how can you produce sound with one hand?" So that is a kind of skillful device in order to help the disciple to find out, to understand his or her situation. And the disciple cannot just use his or her intellect in order to work on the koan. Because the intellect is only part of us, underneath there is the whole subconsciousness, unconsciousness. Underneath there is your body, all the mental formations, your store consciousness. And that why the koan that has been offered by the teacher should not be entertained only by the intellect. It should be buried deeply in the soil, in the flesh of your being. And during your daily life you have to carry the koan with you day and night—eating, sleeping doing things—you are embracing it. That is the full-time embrace. Whether that is your suffering, or your situation that is an impasse, you are stuck, that is your koan. You should be able to mobilize all your strength, all your energy, all your mindfulness and concentration in order to embrace deeply that difficulty, that situation, that deep suffering. And day and night at every moment you only do that—embracing deeply, tenderly. And with the support of the Sangha, one day you will have a breakthrough. The insight can come from you; the insight can come from the Sangha. Or your insight has been supported by the Sangha. Your insight may be an expression of the collective insight of the Sangha. Because you are practically living in the Sangha and the Sangha is practically working with you and supporting you in the attempt to understand your situation. And when the practice comes to the Sangha level, it's very powerful. If the whole Sangha embraces your pain day and night and looks deeply into your pain with the energy of mindfulness and concentration, then there will be quick relief. And there will be insight that can help you to overcome the suffering, that can help you to see the path, and that can help you to get the liberation, the transformation. That is the way it works with you and with your Sangha.

Bell.

I would like to offer an example. There is a community called Order of Interbeing composed of many members. The Order of Interbeing was founded in Vietnam during the war around 1964— '63 or '64. It is composed of monastics and lay people. It is composed of two kinds of communities, the core community—those who have formally received the 14 Trainings—they are called core community. And there are those who have not formally received the 14 Trainings, but who participate in every activity of the Sangha, we call it the extended community. As a community we need some kind of organization. We should organize. But because we have learned that if you are too well organized, it's not too good. We have seen the difference between an organization and an organism. Being an organism that functions well, naturally there is some organization, but it is not intended. If there is harmony, if there is understanding, then you don't need to organize, and yet it is very well organized.

When you look at a community of bees you do not see a leader giving orders, "You do this, you do that," coordinating things, because the beehive is an organism and the element of togetherness is there. The *raison d'être* of the community is to be together, to be wonderfully together. And when you come together as an organism suddenly the insight comes, and everybody knows what to do, and it becomes very well organized without the attempt to organize. Many of us are Sangha builders. We have to focus our attention on this. Sometimes the more we organize the more trouble the organization will become. It is our way of being that can bring about the wellbeing of the community. It is our practice of mindfulness, concentration, insight, loving kindness, that is doing the work of organizing.

The Buddha before his passing away was asked whether he would like to appoint someone to continue to lead the Sangha. He said, "No we don't need a leader." And he was very aware that the Sangha is an organism. If the Sangha practiced well everything will be fine. We don't need a leader at all. The Buddha did not consider himself as a leader. He did not consider himself as a director; he did not consider himself as the boss. He was very pleased at being a monk. He held his bowl and went begging for food like any other monk. He sat at the foot of the tree like other monks. But he was a great inspiration for the whole Sangha. And that's what we should do, we should be an inspiration for the Sangha by our way of acting in harmony, in compassion. When the Sangha becomes an organism, the Sangha will know how to do it. Because the ground of to do is to be. If you know how to be it, then naturally you don't have to worry about to do. To be is the foundation of to do, we have seen that in our second Dharma talk.

So many of us have thought that we need to organize somehow because there is an order, the Order of Interbeing. Now there's about 800 members in the world. It's quite an organization. The Vatican is very well organized as a religion. But we don't want that. We don't want Order of Interbeing to become something like that. That is the last thing we want. We want the Order of Interbeing to be a living organism. We don't want any leader, any boss, any director. That is what we want. And some of us will say how can we survive without some organizing? In the beginning someone may have thought like that, but by this time she has awakened to the fact that we need only to be and they will take care of everything. When the Sangha comes and be together in harmony that is all. You don't need to do any more. You behave like the birds flying

in formation. A formation of birds they don't fly as individuals, you know very well that they fly as a formation. It is very beautiful, very powerful. The Sangha is like that. And the question, how can we allow the Order of Interbeing to be and to be an inspiration for society becomes a koan. And that cannot be solved by the intellect alone. When you come and discuss about organizing you are using your intellect. But when you come together and practice sitting and breathing in and out and become together you become an organism and that theme, that question that you have put out for the Order of Interbeing to become an inspiration and a refuge for the world becomes the koan. You need only to be there as an organism and hold very tenderly that question, that koan, your mind and then insight will come. It's not by doing a lot of thinking. It's not by doing a lot of organizing that we can answer the question. It is by being there, producing the energy of mindfulness, concentration, and insight that we realize, we invent, we create the energy of harmony, of togetherness, and from that foundation will come the insight as to how to be inspiration as an organism. It's clear?

This way of being, this way of operating is quite different—the Sangha way. It is the energy of mindfulness and togetherness that will realize everything and not some five-year plan or something like that. The question is whether the Sangha can come together and be together as an organism. The whole question is that. How to arrange it so that the Sangha can be together a lot, a lot, a lot? That is the only concern. Because the coming together of a Sangha can bring a lot of happiness, can bring a lot of relief, a lot of transformation, a lot of confidence, because a Sangha always generates the energy of mindfulness and concentration and insight. And the Sangha becomes holy because of its practice of mindfulness.

It's very beautiful to see a Sangha silent, moving silently and in harmony. They organize but they don't organize. They don't look if they are organized. They are moving very softly, very silently, like the bees. And no one is giving orders to anyone. We look at each other, we are aware of each other, we are aware of the situation, and naturally the situation becomes as we wish. We have lessons to be given through the bees, through the termites, through the birds, through the fish. It seems we can learn something from them. The scientists of our time begin to speak of animal culture. They do have their culture, they do have their wisdom, their way of life. And many of them we can learn from, because there is a lot of suffering in the community of man and woman. We suffer more than these societies of animals. Individualism prevails. We are deeply divided. We hate each other. We are afraid of each other. And this is not the case of the bees; it is not the case of the fish; it is not a case of the birds. So we can learn many things from them. And this is in the line of Sangha building, of becoming a river.

You are invited to do some mindful movements before we continue.

Bell.

Dear friends, when we come to chapter 24 of the Lotus Sutra, we encounter a bodhisattva whose name is Wonderful Sound and this bodhisattva has been a musician, a composer, and he serves the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, and the world with his music. Yu Am???, his name in Vietnamese, and in English Gadgadasvara. He's one of the visiting bodhisattvas; he comes from another planet. Shakyamuni is a child of the planet earth. And the bodhisattva Never Underestimating is also a child of the earth. Also Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of deep

listening, is also a child of the earth. But Gadgadasvara is one of the visiting bodhisattvas coming from other planets. Because the Buddha, while sitting with his Sangha from time to time he used his beam of mindfulness to touch the cosmos. And he touched many planets in the cosmos. And many bodhisattvas and buddhas in other planets were aware that on this tiny planet earth there is a Buddha teaching, so many of them came to visit. And the Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound is one of them.

When Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound got a beam of light from Shakyamuni, he looked and he saw planet earth with the Buddha and his assembly on the Gridhrakuta Mountain. He wanted to come visit. He asked permission of his teacher and he was allowed to come and bring greetings from his teacher to the Buddha and the Buddha Prabhutaratna in the wonderful jeweled stupa in the air. And his teacher said, My child when you go there, you have to be you have to show your humility. Over there, living beings are small and there are many parts of the earth that are not as beautiful as our planet. So don't look down on them. The Buddha Shakyamuni is a great Buddha and his assembly is also a very distinguished assembly. So be aware of that."

So many, many bodhisattvas followed Wonderful Sound in order to come to the earth for a visit. And before their arrival they produced a lot of huge, beautiful lotus seeds all around Gridhrakuta Mountain. So in the assembly of Shakyamuni there are so many monks and nuns and lay people and bodhisattvas and they don't know what is the reason why these beautiful lotuses just appeared like that. And they turned and asked Shakyamuni Buddha and he said "Well, there are people visiting us, among them Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound. He told them about Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound. He's the one who in his former life has practiced a lot of music and helping the practice of his Sangha. Those of you who are musicians, who are composers, you know you can be a bodhisattva like Wonderful Sound and you can serve the Dharma, the Buddha, and the Sangha with your music.

In Plum Village we practice in music. The music can create harmony within us, and can create harmony within the Sangha. The chanting for instance, can help concentrate and help nourish our concentration, our insight, our devotion, our happiness. Even while you do sitting meditation, you can practice in music with your gathas. You know that there are several voices inside of us that want to express and sometimes more than one of them want to speak up at the same time. By practicing mindful breathing as music, by concentrating on a harmonious kind of music, you can please everyone and help everyone to be peaceful, to be in harmony—and that is part of our practice of sitting meditation, making music inside.

When the Sangha comes together, the silence, the deep mindful breathing—it is music. You enjoy very much that music. There are times when we sit together we don't do anything. We don't work hard at all. We just produce our being, our full presence, and become aware of the Sangha. That is enough to nourish us and heal us. If you know how to allow yourself to be embraced by the Sangha, to become the Sangha, to be penetrated by the music of the Sangha, then transformation and healing can take place already. Music sometimes can be very silent. And this is musical therapy. I do believe in musical therapy. It can create harmony. It can calm things down. It can heal. And that is why Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound is someone who practiced deeply that kind of music, divine music, that helped with the practice of the Sangha. And there are many, many lifetimes where during many lifetimes he only practiced music. He got into the

concentration called the capacity of manifesting oneself in many kinds of bodies. He was able to produce many bodies like Bodhisattva Medicine King, and he went further. He goes further. And in his planet the bodies of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas are much bigger. And it is described that his eyes and the eyes of bodhisattvas in that land were so beautiful, it's like lotus petals. And when people look at Shakyamuni and ask why the appearance of so many beautiful big lotuses like that, Buddha said "Well, we are having visitors from other planets." And he talked to them about the practice of music of Wonderful Sound. And then Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound and his friends manifested themselves and pay respects to the Buddha Shakyamuni and paid respects to the Buddha Prabhutaratna and bring the greetings of the Buddha of their land.

Already in chapter 15, there was so many visiting Bodhisattva from other planets. Because our Buddha was always using the beam of mindfulness in order to touch the cosmos, that is why many of them became aware that there is a Buddha teaching on the planet earth. That is why many people have come to visit the Buddha and his assembly. And when they come they see our planet is small but there is a lot of suffering, and Shakyamuni Buddha is working hard in order to help relieve the suffering, so many of them volunteer to stay and help our Buddha. They are very kind. They have come from other planets and they offer their assistance. But Shakyamuni said "We thank you very much for your good will, but we think we have enough bodhisattvas here in order to take care of ourselves." And he looked deeply into the earth and suddenly many bodhisattvas, beautiful, come up from the earth. All of them are very beautiful, and it is said that they are all disciples of the Buddha Shakyamuni, the child of the earth. And everyone was amazed to see so many bodhisattvas coming up from the inside of the earth. All of them are children of the earth, great bodhisattvas, very beautiful bodhisattvas, and all of them are disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha. And disciples like Shariputra, Moggallana are eager to understand why the Buddha has lived only 40 years on earth and has produced so many disciples. There are those who have been with the Buddha right in the very beginning after his enlightenment, like Assaji, like Kondanna. They know that Buddha has only taught for 35-40 years and how come he has so many disciples. Because they have not seen the Buddha, their teacher in the Ultimate Dimension. They have only seen their teacher in the historical dimension that is why they can't count the number of his disciples.

So Shakyamuni looked deeply into the earth and revealed to him his Ultimate Dimension. Because the life span of a Buddha is limitless and his disciples can only see his physical body in this light. They have not really seen their teacher. They think their teacher is that tiny person sitting there. They think of the work of their teacher as some small thing that he has realized in the period of 40 years. They have not seen much, because they have not touched the Ultimate Dimension. So Shakyamuni was helping to see into the Ultimate Dimension. And one of the things he did was to look deeply on earth and to help bodhisattvas to spring up, to appear—hundreds of thousands of them like that—to prove to the visiting bodhisattvas that we have enough children of the earth that are able to take care of the earth. "We thank you very much, but I think we do have enough bodhisattvas in order to take care of the earth."

You know that in Upper Hamlet there was an area daffodils grow and manifest in the month of March, late March. When we first arrived we were not aware that there were so many daffodils—hundreds of thousands of them just spring up at the end of March, very beautiful. You could not see it at this time or in winter. Suddenly tens of thousands of them spring up like

bodhisattvas. Every one is beautiful and that is why we have given that zone in Upper Hamlet the name The Treasure of the Dharma Body. You don't see it unless it manifests to you. So the Ultimate, you may not see it because you are attached to the Historical, but if you know how to touch the Historical Dimension deeply, you touch the Ultimate Dimension. And with the help of their teacher, the disciples of the Buddha were able to touch and to realize how great their teacher is. Because in the Ultimate Dimension, the lifespan of the Buddha is limitless; and in the Ultimate Dimension your lifespan is also limitless. And that is chapter 15 about Bodhisattvas springing up from the earth. That is an artful device of the Buddha to help his disciples touch the Ultimate Dimension, to see themselves in the Ultimate Dimension, to see their teacher in the Ultimate Dimension. And now they are convinced that children of the earth are enough in order to take care of the earth.

Shakyamuni is a child of the earth. Avalokitesvara is a child of the earth. Life manifested itself on earth when the earth began to cool down. And out of the primitive soup appeared the first cell, maybe with lightning. But we cannot be sure that on Earth there are only children of the Earth. There may be other living beings that have come from other planets. There are so many meteorites that have fallen from the cosmos to the earth. And these meteorites may bring along germs of life inside. And that is why many forms of life on earth can be described as naturalized species. They are not exactly born from the earth. They have come from meteorites and they have been naturalized as children of the earth.

In the Lotus Sutra you have the impression, very clear impression, that we are a small planet. That the Buddha is one of the children of the planet. He wants to take care of his planet. And he has so many disciples that are ready to hold the earth tenderly in their arms and to take care of the planet earth. We do not have any complex, if we know how to do it, that we have enough people in order to take care of our home, the planet earth. And the next bodhisattva that will appear in the Lotus Sutra is Avalokitesvara. He is also a child of the earth. And he is practicing as an arm of the Buddha, as the hand of the Buddha. And he proves that mankind, the children of the earth are quite capable of embracing the suffering of the earth and preserving the beauty, the wonders, of the earth.

So enjoy the 15th chapter of the Lotus Sutra about beautiful children of the earth in the form of bodhisattvas springing up from the earth. Enjoy Chapter 24, the visiting Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound coming from another planet. It is wonderful to realize that we are all in a family. We are all children of the earth, and we should take care of each other. We should take care of our environment. And this is possible with Sangha, with the practice of togetherness. The only way to preserve the earth and the happiness is the practice of Six Togetherness.

3 Bells.

This talk was transcribed by Lorena Monda