

LETTING GO OF
ROSY CLOUDS

Phuoc Duyen Pagoda

Hue - Vietnam

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THICH THAI HOA

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HONG DUC PUBLISHER

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A SUPERSTITIOUS PERSON

Superstition is false belief. That belief may lead a person to disappointment and suffering. But, who among all of us is not superstitious? We should be cautious about ourselves. A religious person who is passionately interested in deities and magic powers believes that deities are the first cause and that only magic powers can solve all problems of life. That religious person is travelling on a misleading path.

Politicians can be extremely superstitious if they are so interested in power and if they believe that power is able to solve all human and social matters. Those politicians are travelling on a misleading path.

Business people can also be extremely superstitious persons if they pay too much attention to interests and benefits, and if they believe that economy is able to create a comfortable

and happy life. Those business people are travelling on a misleading path.

Scientists can be extremely superstitious if they declare that science is omnipotent and has a monopoly to tackle all the progress of human beings. Those scientists are travelling on a cul-de-sac.

Sadly enough, people who indulge in doctrines are those who are travelling on a misleading path with false views and unable to not only realize their wrong things, but also condemn right things of others.

If we can not realize the principle of causes and conditions and of causes and effects so as to eradicate superstition, then those who abolish superstition are more superstitious than other superstitious than any other superstitious persons on earth.

SHEN-HSIU AND HUI-NENG

Buddhist scholars could believe that Patriarch Shen-Hsiu's meditation is the meditation of gradual awakening and Patriarch Hui-Neng's meditation is the meditation of sudden enlightenment.

The content of Patriarch Shen-Hsiu's meditation can be illustrated by the following Buddhist poem:

“Thân thị bồ đề thọ,
Tâm như minh cảnh đài
Thời thời cần phát thức
Vật sử nhá trần ai.”

The poem can be translated as follows:

*“The body is like a bodhi tree,
The mind like the support of a bright mirror,
which should be cleaned constantly
so that no dust can cover it.”*

The content of Patriarch Hui-Neng's meditation can be illustrated by the following Buddhist poem:

“Bồ đề bổn vô thọ,
Minh cảnh diệt phi đài
Bản lai vô nhất vật
Hà xứ nhá trần ai?”

The poem can be translated as follows:

*“Originally, the bohdi is no tree
A bright mirror needs no support
no single form originally exists
what is dusty to be mopped?”*

Patriarch Hui-Neng's meditation of sudden enlightenment cannot be separated from Patriarch Shen-Hsiu's meditation of gradual awakening. If there is no gradual awakening, sudden enlightenment is not possible either. Sudden enlightenment only takes place after

the process of gradual awakening has been fully completed.

Therefore, in meditation, Patriarch Shen-Hsiu's presence lays the foundation for the presence of Patriarch Hui-Neng, and Patriarch Hui-Neng's presence makes Patriarch Shen-Hsiu's presence perfect.

So, when practising meditation, we look into Patriarch Shen-Hsiu to see clearly Patriarch Hui-Neng, and we look into Patriarch Hui-Neng to see clearly Patriarch Shen-Hsiu.

Shen-Hsiu and Hui-Neng are two inseparable entities in the world of meditation.

ONE WHO KNOWS HOW TO LOVE ONESELF

Although you pamper yourself very much, it doesn't mean that you know how to love yourself.

During a meal, due to your appetite, you eat too much, which exhausts your body after the meal. Your flexibility and clear-sightedness become worse and it shows that you do not know how to love yourself.

When you feed yourself with too much beer, wine, fish and meat,... you make your body heavy. You start perspiring heavily and make others uneasy, or you do not walk, stand, lie, sit and speak in a calm, polite and understanding manner, and it shows that you do not know how to love yourself.

You behave towards others in an arrogant and contemptuous manner, or in a biased and cursory

manner, and it shows that you do not know how to love yourself.

You behave towards others with a selfish, narrow-minded, and envious mind and it shows that you do not know how to love yourself.

Those who know how to love themselves do not show such behaviour in their life as mentioned above.

In addition, the ones who know how to love themselves should have the following behaviours:

1. Practise viewing life with eyes of love and behave with love towards life.

2. Practise viewing life with eyes of equality and know how to respect personal possession of others.

3. Practise viewing life with eyes of righteousness and know how to preserve a sense of purpose and uprightness of oneself and of others.

4. Practise viewing life with eyes of honesty and know how to lead an honest life among others.

5. Practise viewing life with eyes of mindfulness without prejudice, without sticking to one's clear-cut and dry views, without blindness, without conservatism, and know how to express one's mindful views through behaviours such as walking, standing, lying, sittings, speaking, and contacting in life.

6. Practise leading a life of less greed and know how to behave in a reasonable way towards the material world so as to spend time practising a peaceful, comfortable and relaxing life.

7. Practise looking into one's suffering so as to sympathize with and share others' suffering.

8. Practise looking into one's happiness so as to share it with others.

9. Practise looking into the results of one's suffering so as to eliminate the causes of the

suffering for yourself and for others.

10. Practise looking into one's results of enlightenment so as to cultivate good seeds for yourself and for others.

11. Practise looking into the impermanence of one's life so as to make attempts in eliminating evil and in doing good deeds.

12. Practise paying attention to everyone and everything around you so as to see the correlation between yourself and other, between yourself and everything and do this with a view to eliminate your egotism. Make your mind dutiful and let mutual respect arise.

When you know how to integrate, practise and nourish the twelve substances mentioned above in your life, you really know how to love and respect yourself, not only in this life but also in many lives to come.

SOURCE OF HAPPINESS

Do you know that one of the ten substances of enlightenment of the Buddha is called Sugata. Sugata makes the Buddha happy all the time?

Sugata or Thiện Thệ is a holy person who attained happiness and realized safety in his life.

What makes you happy and safe? What makes you unhappy and unsafe?

It is Loving and Understanding that will bring you happiness and safety in your life. Selfishness, hatred, anger, and stupidity will make you miserable and unhappy in daily life.

So, when you seek happiness, you look for Loving and Understanding, because Loving and Understanding are the foundation of happiness and safety in life.

Selfishness, hatred, anger, and stupidity are the foundation of unhappiness and suffering.

Do you know that Buddha always loves all beings and that he never gets angry with or feels hatred for any being?

Therefore, he is always a happy person, a safe person in life.

You should know that when you hate or are angry with a person, the first victim to suffer is you, not that person.

A wife who gets angry with her husband, or a husband who gets angry with his wife, leaves the house in anger or keeps starving herself or himself. That angry person is the one to suffer most. The person towards whom the anger or hatred is directed, is not necessarily the person who suffers.

The jealousy of a wife of her husband, or a husband of his wife is bad for body and mind. The stronger the jealousy becomes, the more disastrous it will be for their body and mind.

When a husband or wife lives without proper

attention to faithfulness, no matter how jealous the partner is, it will not help and it will not change the partner's character either.

If you are jealous of your partner, your suffering will increase, and this may lead to destroying your life sooner or later.

Do you know that only stupid persons are jealous of people without faithfulness? On the contrary, a wise husband or wife will never be jealous of his or her partner but only feels pity for him or her. Why? Because a wise person knows clearly that an unfaithful person has always thoughts of fear. He or she is in search of support, and it will lead to disappointment. And when knowing this very clearly, the wise wife or husband may love that unfaithful spouse, because he or she knows with certainty that unfaithful persons are travelling on the wrong path. When you start with a loving feeling for your partner, you feel

happy right at that time, and your partner is not certain to enjoy the happiness. But it is certain that when you love somebody, happiness belongs first to you, not to the person you love.

You should know that our holy Buddha is a person who always enjoys happiness, for he always shows his love. The bigger your love is, the happier you get and the more unlimited your happiness becomes. This is a truth that you can only experience through practice.

First, you should practise loving lovely people, then you should practise loving those who are not lovable. If you practise this every day, your hatred, anger and stupidity will transform by themselves. You will become a source of happiness for yourself and for every living being.

MIRACULOUS REALITY

What do you think makes you unhappy? The sun, the earth, the river, the atmosphere? No, all these things are assisting you and moving you forward every day. Then what makes you miserable? The animals? No, all the animals are helping you to feel happy. Dogs help you to protect your home, cocks crow to wake you up, buffalos help you with farming activities, horses and cows pull carts for your benefits, even pigs in sties help you with their manure to make the soil fertile for plants and flowers or to consume your after-meal food. And snakes, frogs, toads and even trees on both sides of the road, where you often pass by, are all beneficial for you in one way or another. So, why do you lack happiness? Who steals happiness from you? Human beings? Did your parents, siblings, teachers, friends, spouses, children, or your fellow people steal your happiness? No,

they are all benefactors who create conditions for you to attain happiness. But in life, the only person who can give you happiness is you, and nobody else. If you live with your selfish mind, no matter how much power you have over land and water, you are still a poor person, who will always incur sufferings.

If you live with a selfish and egoistic mind, no matter how close you are to Buddha or Jesus, the amount of your suffering will never decrease.

Your suffering originates from yourself, from your selfishness, and from the people you are struggling with for fame and benefits.

So, if you want to end suffering, first of all you have to make efforts to practise meditation so as to identify the nature of your selfishness and practise everyday to end that selfishness.

Once your selfishness does no longer exist, there will be no place anymore for sufferings in your life. Then, each breath, each footstep, each

behaviour, and each contact is a miraculous reality and you are a person that enjoys full happiness.

MEDITATION

Once there was a guest who came to visit That Lang Nghe (Listening House) and asked me questions about meditation.

The guest asked, “What is meditation?”

I answered, “Meditation is not in the question.”

He asked, “Where is it then?”

I answered, “It is not in the answer.”

He asked, “How is it then?”

I answered, “if an action is in mindfulness, it is meditation.”

He asked, “What is mindfulness?”

I answered, “You are walking and you know you are walking. You are sitting and you know you are sitting. You are standing and you know you are standing. You are lying and you know you are lying. You are behaving in such a way and you

know you are behaving in such a way.

Your feeling is present and you know your feeling is present. Your feeling is absent and you know your feeling is absent. Your feelings are in the neutral status and you know your feelings are in the neutral status, i.e. you realize the state in which your feelings are currently in.

The good, bad, or neutral seeds in your mind, which are emerging, latent, or both emerging and latent, or neither emerging nor latent, must be consciously in your control.

Dharmas hindering and obscuring the clarity of the mind, which are present or latent, or both present and latent, or neither present nor latent, must be consciously in your control.

Perceptions brought by thinking, which are present or latent, must be consciously in your control.

Dharmas leading to enlightenment, wisdom such as dharma of discrimination, diligence, calmness,

delight, mindfulness, concentration, actions of renunciation, which are present or latent in the mind, must be conscious in your control.

Dharmas belonging to wisdom which are present, absent, weak or strong in the mind must be consciously in your control.

Those who practise such conscious actions in every second, every minute, every hour, every day through the actions of walking, standing, lying, sitting, eating and drinking, speaking and communicating are the people practising meditation and are meditative people.”

The guest asked, “What is a wrong view?”

I answered, “Those who are walking and thinking that there is an ego walking, standing and thinking that there is an ego standing, lying and thinking that there is an ego lying, sitting and thinking that there is an ego sitting, eating and thinking that there is an ego eating, speaking and thinking that there is an

ego speaking, communicating and thinking that there is an ego communicating, doing an action and thinking that there is an ego doing the action, are people with false thoughts, evil minds, false views, wrong speech, wrong livelihood, incorrect efforts and incorrect concentration. They are walking on the narrow path full of twists and turns and with unexpected obstacles because that path is full of misery and suffering. Those people are not free because they are slaves of their ego, which originates from ignorance and is created by wrong views, wrong minds, and wrong thoughts.”

EACH OF YOUR STEPS

You can walk swiftly, but why do you walk swiftly? What are you looking for when you walk so swiftly?

If you walk so swiftly, accidents may happen to you or you may cause accidents to others.

Why don't you slow down, so as to enjoy and look carefully at every step of your walk?

Such a swift step doesn't contribute to peace and happiness . Peace and happiness only come in each mindful step of your walk.

You should know that walking without mindfulness belongs to species living by unconscious instinct. Animals and insects are species that can walk and move, but they walk and move unconsciously by instinct, therefore, they act in a state of ignorance.

However you belong to the world of consciousness where you have to be conscious of every of your steps. You have to walk in full consciousness. Then certainly you will discover peace in your daily life and the life you will lead is unlimited.

PUT YOUR HEAVY LOAD DOWN

Greed, hatred, ignorance, arrogance, and doubt are heavy loads on mind and consciousness.

In the past, nor at present, or in the future, nobody has the right to put that heavy load on our mind and consciousness and nobody has the right to remove that heavy load from us. This can only be done by us.

Therefore, if you want to walk, stand, lie, and sit peacefully and comfortably, you have to put that heavy load down.

If not, wherever you go, whatever you do or think, it will only make you heavy and consequently unfortunate things may happen in your life.

The luckiest person in life is the person that never carries those heavy loads.

WHO MAKES YOU MISERABLE?

The sun, the earth, rivers, space, white clouds, birds, plants, etc., are all conditions to facilitate your presence and a happy life.

Parents, siblings, friends, humans and animals are assisting you to obtain happiness, so what makes you miserable? What really makes you miserable is your selfishness. If you live in a selfish way you cannot escape suffering; you are a companion of suffering and suffering is your constant companion.

You should know that your selfishness can make others reconsider the kindness they have for you.

So, you have to practise breathing consciously, so that you can realize that your breath is not present on its own. Your breath is present thanks to the presence of the heart, the lungs, the stomach, the liver, the blood vessels, the nervous system,

the skin, the eyes, the nose, and the soul. And your breath is present thanks to the presence of the heart, the lungs, the stomach, the liver, the blood vessels, the nervous system, the skin, the eyes, the nose, and the soul of your parents and ancestors. Also, your breath is present thanks to the presence of the sun, the earth, rivers, space, mountains and forests, the ocean, clouds, lights, and dewdrops.

If those things were not present, your breath could not be present either. If you were not breathing, you could not survive on earth. Therefore, everything is present in you and you are present in every being. You should not be selfish, since selfishness prevents you from being with life; thus damaging yourself and making yourself poor and miserable.

You should know that if you are selfish you will stand alone with suffering in your narrow shelter, whereas everything around

you is moving ahead and innovating. Life is not harsh to you, only your selfishness is. Everything in life, yesterday, today, tomorrow is present in a miraculous way, and in reality its presence is more beautiful than a dream!

ACTIONS IN CONTROL

Happiness does not come down to you from the sky, nor up from inside the earth. It comes from actions in your control.

If you work without control, you lose yourself. In your daily work, if you lose yourself in work, you will become a slave to work and consequently you cannot enjoy happiness.

Can a slave who is forced to work enjoy happiness in his life? Happiness is present only for those who have control over their actions. An action under control in itself creates much happiness.

If you wash dishes in control, you enjoy happiness right in this washing action. On the contrary, if you are told to wash the dishes, you suffer in every action of the washing.

Do you know that an action in control is

an action accompanied by wisdom, and an uncontrolled action is an action accompanied by ignorance?

If you want to control your acts, you have to practise mindfulness every day, because mindfulness is the essential gate to attain enlightenment.

Whenever an action is done with and guided by wisdom, then that action is an action of wisdom. Each action creates happiness and there is no necessity to search for it any longer. Your happiness is no longer a dream but a reality here and now.

DO NOT DESPISE YOURSELF

Who would dare to despise you in life if you do not despise yourself? Nobody can make you noble except you yourself.

If your actions lack compassion, justice, righteousness, honesty and vigilance, they become self-despicable actions.

Once you behave in a self-despicable way, who can still respect you and bring glory to you? Buddha? God? A benevolent King? Absolutely not. Only your actions bear the potential to lift you up or bring you down and confirm who you really are.

Therefore, you should not despise yourself. First, you have to be kind to yourself before you request others to be kind to you.

SOUL AND ACTION

Food and clothing occupy too much time in your daily life. It creates a lot of bustle and makes your day laborious.

Right after you finish doing this piece of work, you start doing another or while you are doing this job you are thinking about another one. Your mind is always busy and never peaceful and relaxed.

If your mind is not peaceful, how can you have peace and happiness? You should not immerse yourself in the feeling of eating and clothing. If you make use of this feeling to enjoy yourself, you will be misled and controlled by these trivial things, and you are no longer free.

Your beauty and happiness do not lie in food and clothes, but they lie in your soul and your behaviour full of unselfishness. Your soul

and image are only beautiful whenever you have
unselfish actions.

A SUDDEN CONVERSATION

A group of 14 American students, headed by Professor John Eastman, travelled to Vietnam to visit and study Asian religions. They visited Tu Hieu Pagoda at 11 o'clock on August 6, 1998. They enjoyed a vegetarian meal and enquired about Buddhism.

I, together with Monks Minh Duc, Tu Hoa, Minh Nguyen and Minh Chieu, received the group and had a conversation that lasted about one hour and thirty minutes. The students asked me the following questions:

1. How did the governments treat the religions in Vietnam before 1975 and after?

We answered:

The capitalists behaved towards the religion in a way that they understood that religion and the communists behaved in a similar way.

In each circumstance there were advantages and disadvantages for the religions.

However, those advantages and disadvantages do not matter. What matters is whether we practise in accordance with the principles set by our religion or not.

2. In Hanoi, we witnessed that some monks and nuns live together in a pagoda. Is that according to the Buddhist commandments?

We answered:

Buddhist commandments indicate that nuns always rely on monks for guidance in Buddhist practice, but they are absolutely not allowed to live together in a monastery.

3. Why did Buddha set more commandments for nuns than for monks?

We answered:

In Buddhism, there is no discrimination, since our Buddha said, “All sentient beings

possess Buddhist nature and they are able to become buddhas in the future.”

How ever, due to the psychological and physiological formation of females, which is more complex than that of males, Buddha based the commandments on the psychological and physiological formation of each gender, for the purpose of practice and transformation and thus assisting them to approach a peaceful and happy life.

4. Why are there more nuns than monks in Vietnam?

We answered:

The first human responsibility is to protect the country. Therefore a majority of men have to join the army, thus preventing them from leaving home to become a monk.

The second human responsibility is to preserve and develop the blood-relationship in families; therefore leaving home to become a

monk meets with many obstacles.

The third human responsibility is to be breadwinners in the family. Since the Vietnamese economy depends largely on agriculture, each family needs manual strength of males in production activities.

Those are the main reasons for the fact that there are more nuns than monks in Vietnam.

In addition, there are other reasons relating to psychology, physiology, and political circumstances, etc.

5. Why are there no nuns in Buddhism in Sri-lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia?

We answered:

The Buddhism that is practised in those countries is the Vinaya-pitaka of Theravada, one of the three divisions of the Canon or Tripitaka. Females can leave home and become nuns for 24 hours, without

becoming a nun permanently. Because in the light of the Vinaya-pitaka of Theravada, due to the weak nature in psychology and physiology, females are generally unable to undergo the difficulties to maintain and develop the Correct Doctrine of the Buddha.

Therefore, nuns are rarely seen in Buddhism in those countries.

On the contrary, the Buddhism in China, Vietnam, Japan, Korea, Tibet and Mongolia, is based on the developed Vinaya-pitaka of Mahasanghika and in these countries females can enter nunhood, not only for 24 hours, but also permanently, as commonly practised at the time of Buddha

After Buddha entered into nirvana, Theravada and Mahasanghavada were the first two main schools that came into existence. They laid the foundation for other Buddhist schools later on.

The division of schools in Buddhism is chiefly because of the need of maintaining and developing the Correct Doctrine of the Buddha rather than because of other reasons.

6. Are human beings born good or evil?

We answered:

When human beings are born, it is not certain to confirm if they are good or evil.

If a human being is born, his or her mind starts with a good deed and that mind is nurtured in a favourable circumstance for the development of the good. What is good will be nurtured in that human being and that human being can be called a good person.

If a human being is born, his or her mind starts with an evil thing and that mind is nurtured in a favourable circumstance for the development of the evil. What is evil will be harboured in that human being and that human being can be called an evil person.

Therefore, according to the Buddhist doctrine, a human being cannot be said to be either good or evil when he or she is born.

7. Why does Buddhism advocate vegetarianism?

We answered:

Because we love and protect peace. Your meals show a warlike life when your chopsticks touch the meat of animals.

And your meals show a peaceful life when your chopsticks touch the food made from plants.

War originates from greed and meals, and peace also originates from love and meals. Your love has to be manifested through the everyday meals.

Being on a vegetarian diet is a concrete manifestation towards oneself, human beings and other species.

Being on a vegetarian diet is a concrete

manifestation of a peaceful life.

8. How does Buddhism solve the problem of war?

We asked them:

Have you ever had war with your loved ones?

The students said yes. We asked them: “Why?”

They answered that it resulted from their hatred, anger and discontentment with one another.

We said, “The world is in war because there is greed, selfishness, hatred and anger, ignorance, and egoistic attachment of human beings.”

Therefore, solving the world war is not done by disarmament and limitation of nuclear weapons but by removing greed, selfishness, hatred and anger, ignorance, self-conceit in each individual person as well as the

community person.

We have to bring our mind back to the status of peacefulness. The behaviour between people should be linked by substances created by making conversations, understanding, loving, and supporting one another in order to build up common beautiful things between human beings.

9. How many times a day does the sangha in this monastery practise meditation?

We told them that we practise meditation four times a day. At midnight, each monk meditates in private, the next meditation is in the morning from 7am to 8:30 am in the meditation hall, the third one is in the evening from 7:20 pm to 8:00 pm also in the meditation hall, and the fourth is again in private from 9:30 pm to 10:00 pm. At noon we have lunch in mindfulness for more than one hour.

10. What kind of activities do you regularly do at the monastery and what kind of contributions

do you make to the society on a daily basis?

We answered:

Every day, we take care of our mindfulness in every action of walking, standing, lying, sitting, eating and drinking, speaking, learning and working at the monastery. It is our action of mindfulness that contributes to life. We only make contributions to life by our everyday efforts of mindfulness.

After the students asked us 10 questions, which were all answered by us, we asked them: “Do you still have any other question?”

They said that they had no further questions and they thanked us for all the answers.

We said: “If you do not have any question anymore, now, please allow us to ask you a question, only one question.”

They agreed and we raised the following question: “What do you think is the most important

in your life?”

A majority of the students considered their family and their relationship with everybody else as the most important thing.

Some were putting more importance on the love between couples and friendship.

Some others emphasized pursuing life and nurturing peace for themselves and for others.

Then they asked us, “What about you?”

We answered that in our life, soul and breath are the most important.

Why? Because if there were no soul, we would not have family love, love between couples, love between friends, love for the country, love for fellow species and love for nature. If there were no breath, we would not be alive. Therefore, soul and breath are the most important in our life.

Therefore, you have to know how to

nurture your breath in a conscious way so as to be in contact with your soul and make it peaceful, pure and clean.

Once your soul is peaceful, pure and clean, your mind will be bright and able to act in your life as a guide in a free and peaceful way. From that moment, there is happiness and a noble life. Therefore, you should practise together with us!

Then the students practised together with us, followed and went deeper into their breath and their feeling gained from the practice of breathing

About eight minutes passed by and then Professor Eastman, head of the group, said to us: “Thank you very much for sharing your time and your teaching with us today. I hope to return soon again and study more. And I know my students will continue to think about your teachings after they returned to America.”

A PERMANENT POOR PERSON

You may go to church, pagoda, or any monastery to pray, but your Honourable Greatest Master does not offer what you are looking for. You continue living a poor life with disappointment and misery.

To respect your Honourable Greatest Master is a precious thing. But it is more precious if you hold your Honourable Greatest Master in high respect from the bottom of your heart without having any idea of taking advantage of this respect just for your own benefit.

If you take advantage of your holy Master's perfectness for your own benefit or for your egotism, you will immediately be deprived of the life of perfectness. You will suffer unlucky and disappointed things in life.

You may be a very rich person in terms of material facilities or social positions, but you

may be poor in soul, understanding and love.

You should know that poverty in material facilities or in social positions is only temporary poverty, but poverty in soul, understanding and love is obviously permanent poverty.

If you do not have a soul you could not attain any understanding. If you do not attain any understanding you are not able to make proper use of the material facilities. So you are not in control of materials and positions, then you remain a slave to them all.

Therefore, you are not your own self, but in fact you are the thing you are searching for and which is in control of you. What you are searching for will deceive you, and what you are in control of will control you and it will imprison you for life.

Meanwhile, life is so rich and unlimited. Life is not so poor as your tight fist. Let your fingers stay free from your fist, let your view stay free and let your mind stay free, so that you can

become a rich person in this life.

If your soul, your knowledge, and your hand are closed, you will be permanently poor, even though you are now in control of a treasure of valuables or a boundless territory. If your soul, your knowledge, and your hand get closed, even though you devote your time at your monastery to prayers, your holy Master only looks at you with smiles full of pity. Your poverty, disappointment and suffering remain unchanged, and the present remains the same as the past.

YOUR PRECIOUS THING

Do you ever believe that a person full of doubt and prejudice can take in your honest and sweet words?

If you believe so, you are supposed to be too innocent. Why? Because a person whose mind and perception have been absorbed by the substance of doubt cannot realize what honest and sweet words are. That person is unable to understand the reality. Even though you share your honest life and honest words with such a person, it is possible that his or her doubt may increase and this doubt may drive your honesty out of his or her life.

Do you know that doubt is one of the obstacles when living together? Doubt is one of the substances that originates from ignorance. Doubt often goes hand in hand with conservatism and fear. Those who live in a state of doubt lead a

most conservative, fearful and lonely life on earth. In fact, they suffer a miserable life.

Sharing your heart and honesty with others is a precious thing, but that preciousness counts for nothing to persons full of prejudice and doubt. Your honest words are more precious than gold, but that preciousness is never accepted by people who are full of prejudice and doubt for noble goals of life.

Do you know that gold is precious? You should know how to offer your preciousness, which is like gold to those who are able to make use of gold for the benefit of the community. That is the most precious thing on earth.

THE FIERCE TRAP OF FIRE

In your daily life, you may fall into traps of fire many times, or you are pushed into traps of fire by others. This is because you lose yourself by your anger and reproach to others, or by others' deceitful praises, criticisms or sneers to you.

Do you know that anger and resentment are a fire originating from an irritated mind? That fire burns your happy life, not only during one life but during many lives to come. You may have fallen into the trap of fire a million times and each time you fall into that fire trap, your happiness and peace are completely burnt out.

If you want to have a happy life, you should neither be angry nor resentful; you should neither avenge nor become displeased. Anger, resentment, revenge, and displeasure are all motives that

push you into traps of fire and you will be burnt and suffer in the prison of fire.

Do you know that traps of fire or volcanoes are dangerous, but that you can keep away from them? However, when traps of fire or volcanoes are in operation in your mind, you cannot escape from them. Therefore, whenever the volcano in your mind is on fire, your whole forest of blessed virtues, beauties, understanding, human conduct, belief and love will be burned to ashes. Your life is then no better than ashes.

Every day you can spend a lot of time taking care of your skin, your face, your body, your clothing, and your position, but how much time a day do you spend on your soul?

It is very dangerous if you only spend time taking care of external and temporary things without devoting time to cultivating your soul. Why? Because your soul is a permanent thing which is

the source of your happiness or suffering.

If you only spend time taking care of the temporary appearance without paying attention to the permanent thing inside, sooner or later you will become disappointed, and the volcano of your soul will be on fire, burning all the things that you have searched for and obtained!!!

A PURE LAKE

Your eyes may either be a fierce trap of fire or a very clear lake of water. Similarly, other organs in your body can be a fierce trap of fire that burns your life, or they can be a very pure lake of water in which you can swim or clean your body, or by which you can make a walk or cultivate your joyful life.

So, all conditions of happiness or suffering are really present in you. Do you realize it?

Your eyes can be a pure lake of water, if you use those eyes of mindfulness and love to look at people, other beings, and sights around you. Your hands can be a pure lake of water if you make use of them in mindfulness and love so as to touch and receive what is coming to you. If you hold something which is withering in your hands in mindfulness and love, it can certainly become fresh and lively.

Do you know that your eyes, your hands, and other organs can only become pure lakes of water when your soul is pure and transparent? Thanks to the transparency of your soul, you can look at all phenomena of birth and death, of form and appearance, of perceptions and feelings, thus enabling you to behave transparently towards what is happening in your life.

If you have a clear soul, all phenomena of birth and death, of coming and leaving in life cannot make you fearful. You can smile at what is coming and leaving in your life. You only need to sit peacefully and breathe consciously so as to look deeply into your mental perception. Right after the pure lake from your mental perception appears, you do not look for anything else. You only sit there to look at the lake, and you can see the sun, the moon, and thousands of stars in your pure lake. You will smile because you realize that the pure lake is your mental perception and you will see that

your mental perception and the sun, the moon, and thousands of stars are as one. Your mental perception in the past, at present, and in the future is as one. Your mental perception and your ancestors are as one. And countless worlds are present in your pure lake. At that moment you will clearly see the nature of the countless worlds that are joyfully present in front of you.

You will penetrate into the countless worlds and the countless worlds will penetrate into you, that is the truth. But you cannot recognize it, because the lake in your mental perception is impure by greed and desire.

If your lake of mental perception is clear, you will see clearly that you belong to the countless worlds and the countless worlds are present in you. Immediately you become rich and you don't complain anymore.

THE LEMON TREE BY A STREAM

Do you know that there is a lemon tree by a stream, but it does not receive the coolness and freshness of the stream? The tree withers day after day and soon it dies. Do you think it is a pity for the tree?

In the same way, there are many people who lead their lives in the vicinity of Persons of Virtue and Wisdom, or by Buddha's dharmas, but their lives wither day after day.

They wither because they like to sit by a Person of Virtue and Wisdom but they do not want to become a Person of Virtue and Wisdom. They wither because they like to listen to Buddha's dharmas but they do not want to practise the dharmas.

Do you know that peace and happiness can only take place whenever we practise the dharmas in life, absolutely not when we only

listen to the dharmas.

People who only listen to Buddha's dharmas or only believe in the dharmas but who do not know how to practise the dharmas, they are just like lemon trees standing by a stream even though they claim to be disciples of the Buddha.

A JUDGE

You might have judged about what is right or wrong or about gain and loss of others, but do you ever act as a judge to make judgements about what you yourself have done during the day?

It is easy to judge what is right or wrong from others, but you cannot judge well what is right or wrong from yourself.

Do you know that Persons of Virtue and Wisdom always look for their own mistakes to think over and to transform them? But ordinary people always hide their errors. Instead, they see the errors of others and talk about these errors to other people.

Persons of Virtue and Wisdom think over their own mistakes during their meals so that their eating activities do not lead them to wrong

paths. They think over the mistakes they made while they are drinking so that their drinking activities do not lead them to wrong paths.

While they are working, they think over what they are doing to avoid making mistakes. While they are walking, standing, lying, sitting, speaking, communicating, learning, or whatever they are doing, they think over what they are doing so that what they are doing goes in the right direction.

Persons of Virtue and Wisdom are those who judge themselves and do not give others the chance to make judgements. Therefore, all their behaviours lead to paths of peace and happiness free from anxiety and suffering.

Ordinary people do not pay attention to their actions while they are having their meals, so that they cannot avoid making mistakes during the meals. Likewise, they do not pay attention to their mistakes while

they are drinking, walking, standing, lying, sitting. Therefore they fall into evil karma, which makes them unable to look at their mind and thoughts while they are thinking and therefore they are deceived by evil thoughts. It follows that the thoughts and behaviours of ordinary people all create disaster and suffering for others whenever they don't consider their own intentions and behaviours.

Ordinary people do not have the ability to submit themselves to self-judgement, so they remain slaves forever and burn their life in the fire of ignorance.

Persons of Virtue and Wisdom and ordinary people differ in this ability to submit or not to submit themselves to self-judgements.

Therefore, you should act as a judge for yourself every day, before you are in a position to judge others!

STILL THERE - THE CUP OF TEA

Zen master Zhao-Chou, who lived in ninth century China, was a great Zen master at the time. Therefore many scholars in the world came to him and asked for meditation lessons.

Once the Zen master asked a monk who came to visit him:

“ Did you ever come here?”

The monk answered:

“ No, I haven’t”

The Zen master said:

“ Drink tea, please!”

Another time, the Zen master asked another monk who came for the master’s lessons:

“Have you ever come here?”

The monk answered:

“ Yes, I have.”

The Zen master said:

“ Drink tea, please!”

Upon hearing these words from the Zen master, the abbot of the monastery immediately asked him:

“To those who have not yet come to the monastery, it is acceptable to teach them how to drink tea; but to those who have already come to the monastery, why did you ask them to drink tea?”

The Zen master replied the abbot:

“Dear abbot!”

“Yes, master?”

“Please drink tea!”

Zen master Zhao-Chou taught many people how to drink tea, but not many, including the abbot, were willing to drink their cup of tea.

Alah! People are only interested in discussing the obtaining of tea, but virtually

nobody is voluntary to hold the cup of tea to
drink!

SAD EYES

If you love somebody or if somebody loves you without a possessive mind, that love will bring about fruitful results.

On the contrary, if you love somebody, or if somebody loves you with a possessive mind, certainly your love and your partner's love will lead to bitter and poisonous results which will destroy you and your partner.

Novice Tam Thanh at Tu Hieu Pagoda is a result of unhealthy love. His father and mother wanted to satisfy their sexual desire rather than leading a decent marital life. They quarrelled all the time and after that they separated. Tam Thanh had to live with his grandparents when he was eight. Two years later, due to the fact that Tam Thanh suffered under the conditions, his grandparents decided to send him to Tu Hieu Pagoda for personal cultivation

and Buddhist practice.

Tam Thanh's eyes were very sad. That innocent sadness was caused by other people. He was the victim of a bitter love.

Even though Tam Thanh was sent to the pagoda by his grandmother for personal cultivation and Buddhist practice, he could not lead a peaceful life there. For over two years, his parents didn't stop troubling him at the pagoda. He was an excuse for his parents to have quarrels with improper words.

Though still small, he realized this sad situation. Therefore he was determined to stay at the pagoda despite his parents' insisting him to come home. He refused not because he did not love his parents, but because he was too young to help them to get out of this sad situation.

His parents' love may be shared by some of us, in some form or other.

When harbouring a possessive love, you

may imprison your lover and create a pair of sad eyes as your future fruits.

WHERE IS YOUR RELIGIOUS PATH?

Where are you searching for your religious path? In the mountain? In the city? In temples or churches?

You should put an end to that way of searching. As a result, your religious path will appear before you.

Do you know that if your mind is peaceful and transparent, you can see your religious path everywhere? The religious path is inherently present in you and your mind.

OBJECT OF THOUGHT

The object of thought of ordinary people is money, form and appearance, fame and benefits, meals and drinks, and sensual desires.

The object of thought of Sravakas - sound hearers – is the Four Noble Truths.

The object of thought of Pratyeka-buddhas is the Twelve Nidanas

The object of thought of Bodhisattvas is the six Paramitas and the ten Thousand Conducts.

The Buddha has no object of thought. He is Amoha – Wisdom. Wisdom is Marga – the Truth. The Truth by nature has no subject or object. The Truth is the Truth!

ZEN MASTER AND A DOG

No Ky was a dog living in a pagoda at Mount Duong Xuan. It was a very lovely dog, but it was also terrible because it barked constantly whenever it met a visitor.

One day there was a guest who came to the pagoda for a visit. No Ky barked at the guest repeatedly. The master scolded it but it still kept barking. Finally it was beaten by the master and consequently, it ran out of the pagoda.

Also on that day, a novice at the pagoda made a mistake. He was reprimanded by the master, but he found ways to deny his mistake. Finally he was beaten by the master. Consequently, the novice ran out of the pagoda.

On the same day, the master left the pagoda for service, and he came back in the evening. When he approached the gate, the dog was

standing there and wagging its tail to welcome him.

But the novice left the pagoda for one day, for two days, three days, seven days... and for the whole year, but he never returned.

The master gathered the sangha and said, “The more our anger is, the less our reasoning becomes. The less our anger is, the more our reasoning becomes. The more our anger is, the more our betrayal becomes. The less our anger is, the more our understanding and loyalty becomes. You should know that it is greed and anger itself, nothing else, that drives us out of the pagoda.”

Dear Sangha, No Ky’s anger lasted only for a short time and had the opportunity to return to the pagoda, stay there, transform and move forward. However, the novice’s anger, even though he is a human being, still is within him. As a result, he does not have the opportunity to practise Buddhist dharma. Even though he is

human, he is no better than animals.

Therefore, please take care of your mind!!!”

STIRRING!

If you want to mix water and milk, you have to use a chopstick or a spoon to stir, and after a while, the water is not water any more and the milk is not milk any more, but the water and the milk become one, the water is the milk, and the milk is the water. They become a drink that is able to satisfy your thirst and make you feel comfortable after drinking it.

Similarly, in your life you should not fear to be stirred by others nor avoid stirring others.

If in life, you need to be stirred so as to melt away certain particularities, you should try to poke or encourage others to stir you for your benefit!

Why? If you do not get stirred, you cannot melt away those particularities which belong to you.

You should know that human beings are inherently consistent with nature, but due to ignorance, they do not realize this consistency. Therefore, they develop a particular ego, and are controlled by that particular ego. Consequently, they live as slaves according to that illusory ego, or as victims who are deprived of all freedom by sensual desire.

If you want to get out of that life of slavery, you have to stir or invite others to stir for you.

You should know that nature possesses a whirling energy, and thanks to this energy, nature is a lovable and respectable symbol for all of us. If all the elements in nature do not stir together, it would be impossible for all the species to live, to develop, to produce flowers and fruits, to continue existing.

All the elements in nature follow the principle of *causes and effects*, nature of *causes and effects* is *causes and conditions*, nature of

causes and conditions is interaction, and nature of interaction is “stirring”.

The effect of “stirring” is to destroy every category of particularity formed in a conventional and poor manner by human consciousness about the world as well as about each individual, so as to assist human beings to get out of all egoistic ideologies.

“Stirring” is the earth-shaking scream of Master Lin-Chi, which removes all egoistic language as well as every old habit or past knowledge about the particular individuality by people who reflect upon the Noble Path.

CONSCIOUSNESS OF SELF-CONTROL

You may want to control humans and animals, and you may wish that what you control goes in your direction and stays in your hands.

If your wish does not come true, you will get disappointed and miserable.

My dear friend, you should not get disappointed and miserable in such a funny way. Why? Because you should wonder whether you have yourself under control already? If you cannot control yourself, you should wonder who and what you can control.

So, if you want to control humans and animals effectively, first of all, you should practise controlling yourself.

If you manage to control yourself from breath to soul in a firm and conscious way, you

will be successful in all aspects.

On the contrary, if you are not able to control yourself but wish to control others, you will be so stunned about what is happening in your daily life and around you.

I wish you success on the way to self-control.

CONSCIOUSNESS OF LIVING TOGETHER

You have the right to claim independence and to say that you have grown up and need to live an independent life.

Your claim about that matter is within your rights and you have the right to speak whatever you like. You have the right to deal with things.

But, you should know that nothing is existing in an independent way, but everything exists in an inter-dependent way. It means that this thing exists on the basis of that thing, and that thing exists on the basis of this thing. The sky exists on the basis of the earth, the earth exists on the basis of the sky. The day exists on the basis of the night, and the night exists on the basis of the day. Everything on earth exists on the basis of inter-dependence. Without inter-dependence one cannot exist; if this one cannot exist, that one

cannot exist either. If nothing exists, nothing can claim to be independent.

Therefore, you claim to have an independent life, no matter what it is independent of, but that claim is totally hopeless, and that claim originates from ignorance.

If your claim originates from ignorance, the implementation of that claim is useless in real life.

So, you should get rid of the illusion and glory of independence, but start to be aware of living together, so that your life will no longer be frozen and isolated.

RECEIVING HAPPINESS

Happiness in life comes to you, not from one direction but from every direction. If you think that only money can bring you happiness, you will be miserable and disappointed because of money. Why? Because money is not everything. It is only one part of life that assists you to deal with some affairs in life.

You should not think that you enjoy happiness only when you have a good position in the society. If you think so, you will be miserable and disappointed because of that thought. Because many people in life can enjoy happiness even though they do not have any position in the society.

Do you know that happiness does not come down from the sky, nor from the earth, nor from anybody else. Happiness comes to you from every direction. If you are able to look, to listen, to contact in

calmness and wisdom any affair that comes to you, you can receive happiness anywhere and anytime, within yourself and around you.

You can look at a drifting yellow leaf on an autumn afternoon or listen to drops of water raining on a winter evening, or a flower in full bloom in spring sunlight, or coloured clouds on the sky-line on a summer evening with eyes in calmness and with full understanding of those phenomena of birth and death. Those phenomena of birth and death will certainly bring you much happiness.

So, you can receive happiness from every direction, not only from one single direction. You can touch it from your look, your listening, your breathing, your standing, your sitting, and your walking...

If you are able to recognize that in life, you will certainly be very rich in happiness. You do not need to look for happiness. You only

need to stop your hasty look, your hasty listening, your hasty walking, standing, lying, and sitting, your hasty speech, which are all causes of misery and then you will certainly have happiness, and happiness will come to you from every direction.

So, are you ready yet to receive the happiness that comes to you?

CATCHING A SNAKE FROM ITS TAIL

Do you know that many people were told that snake meat was very delicious and so they went to wild areas to look for snakes for meat? However, they did not know how to catch the snakes. They caught the snakes by taking them by their tails, and got killed by the snakes' bites.

Similarly, many people were told that happiness would come to those who have five desires. So they took their time to hunt for five desires to establish their happiness and consequently they were killed by the five desires themselves.

Do you know that if you want to catch a snake you have to use a crutch to press the neck of the snake? Afterwards you can take it by the neck with your hand, and its life is then in your hand for your benefits.

Similarly, if you want to catch the five desires and drive them out of your life, you have to make your mind peaceful in your *Precept* practice, *Concentration* practice, and *Wisdom* practice, so that you are able to control and transform your five desires in a peaceful direction.

So, if you want to catch a snake or hunt for five desires, you should know how to control them from their essential location.

Hopefully you succeed in catching a snake.

THE FINGER AND THE MOON

On November 26, 1998, there was a guest coming to That Lang Nghe (Listening Home) for a visit and inquiry related to Buddhism.

The guest asked:

Is meditation an end of Buddhism?

I answered: No.

Is the Pure Land an end of Buddhism?

I answered: No.

The guest asked:

Is Mantrayana or Tantric Buddhism an end of Buddhism?

I answered: No.

Is Sravakayana an end of Buddhism?

I answered: No.

Is Pratyeka-buddha-Vehicle an end of Buddhism?

I answered: No.

Is Bodhisattva-Vehicle an end of Buddhism?

I answered: No.

Is the matter of building and developing the Buddhist Congregation an end of Buddhism?

I answered: No.

So, what is the end of Buddhism?

I answered: The Buddhist Path.

- Is meditation not the Buddhist Path?

- No. It is only a means.

- Is The Pure Land not the Buddhist Path?

- No. It is only a means.

- Is Mantrayana not the Buddhist Path?

- No. It is only a means.

- Is Sravakayana not the Buddhist Path?

- No. It is only a means.
- Is Pratyeka-buddha not the Buddhist Path?
- No. It is only a means.
- Is Bodhisattva-Vehicle not the Buddhist Path?
- No. It is only a means.
- Is the Buddhist Congregation not the Buddhist Path?
- No. It is only a means.

They are all not the end, but temporary means to the end, which is the Buddhist Path.

If you want to see the moon, you should take advantage of the pointing fingers of the guides. But the pointing fingers are not the moon. The fingers and the moon are two different objects. You should realize that fact, so that you can practise Buddhism in accordance with your own circumstances and conditions; and so that you can make your Buddhist practice

flexible in accordance with time, opportunity, and place; and so that you can stop all trivial and nonsensical arguments on “*this thing only exists without the existence of the other*”.

SMILE AND TAKE A WALK

The guest asked: What is the end of life?

I answered: Death.

The guest asked: What is the end of death?

I answered: Life

The guest asked: How is life related to death?

I answered: Cause and condition

The guest asked: What is a person who knows how to take care of life and death?

I answered: Do not create cause and condition of the life-death circle.

The guest asked: What is the cause of the life-death circle?

I answered: Ignorance and Sankhara - mental formation forces, thirst of love and possession.

The guest asked: What is the condition of

the life-death circle?

I answered: The six sense interaction with the six sense objects. They are in agreement with one another without the presence of mindfulness.

The guest asked: How can the cause and condition of life and death be transformed?

I answered: by the practice of the Noble Path

The guest asked: How can the holy truth be attained?

I answered: Smile and take a walk between the two sides of life and death.

The guest asked: Oh, I see!

I answered: Not at all.

FIRM ROOT, STABLE TRUNK

The mind is the root of the body. A peaceful mind results in a stable body. The body becomes hurtful just because the mind is impure. The unhealthy body is only cured successfully if the unhealthy mind is treated completely. A mind full of worry, fear, anger, blame and greed will certainly lead to an unhealthy body that damages that mind.

For example, an angry mind will result in insomnia, digestive problems, and consequently this will lead to neurasthenia or digestive disorders...

A greedy mind will lead to calculations of risks and benefits, of loss and gain, and consequently this will lead to a stroke or twitching limbs disease...

A blind mind will take its body to superficiality and meanness.

Therefore, the mind is the owner of every good and evil action, actions of disaster and happiness, luck and risk, and misery or peacefulness.

It follows that if our body needs stability and longevity, our mind has to be in peace. With a peaceful mind all disaster will become happiness, risk becomes luck, misery becomes peacefulness, stupidity becomes wisdom, disorder becomes order. With an insecure mind, all luck will become risk, wisdom becomes stupidity, order becomes disorder...

History shows that all the intellectuals from the East to the West have based the development of the body upon the development of the mind. Thus they stand stable so as to make their actions beneficial to the society, and that all the fools have devoted their efforts to developing their body without paying due attention to their mind development. Therefore their body is unstable

and shakes whenever there is a strong wind in life, which prevents them from serving human beings!

PROSPERITY AND DECLINE

The prosperity or decline of Buddhism does not lie in the action of segregation or the appearance of temples and Buddhist associations, but in a life aiming towards enlightenment or not.

Wherever there is life without the aim to enlightenment, there is no Buddhism, or it is Buddhism in decline.

Wherever people know how to cultivate a life of enlightenment, there is Buddhism and Buddhism is prosperous there, even though there are no Buddhist congregations or associations.

Therefore, the prosperity of Buddhism is the prosperity of an enlightenment-oriented life. And the decline of Buddhism is a life in decline, a life without any attention to enlightenment.

At present, there are temples in China that were built more than a thousand years ago. There are

monasteries where a few hundred monks are living and where Buddhist books are published, but the prosperity of Buddhism has not been found. Why? Because a mindful life and the consciousness of enlightenment are obstructed and thus cannot reflect its natural status. Only a form of enlightenment, not the content of enlightenment is found there, and that is the serious decline of Buddhism.

CHASING WAVES OF SUNLIGHT

At present many responsible and enthusiastic leaders in the world want to stabilize the situation of humans, because this situation decreases seriously. Every measure has been taken by them, but it seems that all these measures do not turn out to be effective. Human society seems to be in a cramp day by day. Human life is in a crisis and at a standstill. The more efforts people make to stabilize the society, the more disappointed they become about their efforts. Why do they end up in this serious situation? Just because the leaders do not understand what a society is. If they realized that a society is only the image of humans and that image of humans is the image of the mind and consciousness, they would be able to create ways to stabilize it. So, a society fully reflects what a human being is and in the image of a human

being is reflected what his or her mind and consciousness is.

Therefore, if we want to stabilize the society, we have to stabilize the humans first, and if we want to stabilize the humans, we have to stabilize their mind and consciousness. Every disorder in humans and society originates from the disorder in individual humans' and community's mind and consciousness. If we do not make use of proper methods to stabilize the individual human mind and consciousness, the image of disorder coming from human society remains projected onto every field of life and creates social disorder. Therefore, if we want to stabilize the society, first of all we have to stabilize the individual human mind and consciousness. If we do not follow this way, the work of stabilizing the society by all the leaders in the world is only a job of chasing waves of sunlight.

SLEEPING DEADLY IN THE SUNLIGHT

When night comes, you should lie peacefully to follow your breath and sleep well so that your health can be restored. When your mind is peaceful, dawn will come to you, without your effort to seek and wait for it.

If when dusk comes, you regret that dawn has gone, and you make every effort to search for it, certainly you will never see it. And when the dawn really comes, your mind will be unclear and deadly sleeping in the sunlight. That is the most miserable thing in your life.

Dusk and dawn help you to regain a life of happiness and peace. Do you realize that? If you do not realize it, you cannot avoid miserable and disappointing things in your life!

HUE COMES WITH LOVE

Hue comes to Vietnam not in a violent way to conquer but by peaceful and gentle love.

Huyen Tran Princess, a devout Buddhist believer, pleased her father and brother's request to get married to Cham King Che Man, after Cham King offered Dai Viet two provinces of O and Ri, which are now part of Quang Binh and Quang Tri, Thua Thien and part of Quang Nam.

In 1307, King Tran Anh Tong officially received these two provinces and named them Thuan Chau and Hoa Chau.

Hue is in the name of Hoa and its origin comes along with Thuan.

Thuan Hoa follows the intention and power of the national soul so as to expand the territory and bring the profound and heroic beauty of Dai Viet which transforms and advances the

neighboring region.

Thuan Hoa has high mountains, deep rivers, productive rice fields, ponds and lagoons, and a long range of white sand, Thuy Duong stretching along the seashore territory that embraces the ocean. Nature has created a magnificent, wealthy and dynamic picture.

Truoi Mount, Bach Ma, Thuy Van, Vinh Thai, Hai Van... are immeasurably high mountains. The O Lau river, the Bo river, the Huong river, the Truoi river, each has immeasurably deep sections.

The stable standing and immeasurable height of the mountains, the gentle flowing, peacefulness, and immeasurable depth of the rivers, the greenness of rice fields, the decanting manner of lagoons, the immensity of the ocean, the tolerance and purity of the sand have all created the soul and high sense of purpose and uprightness of the people living here.

The origin of the rivers is not only from the deep ground but also from the top of the high mountains, therefore, the rivers in Hue are never dry. The water comes from the top of high and deep mountains, then travels through rice fields, towns and cities, making gardens of egg-plants, rice, potato rich in nutrients; lemon trees filled with buds; pomelo trees abundant with flowers; and ranges of green bamboo trees full of cool shades at noon in the summer.

The rivers in Hue, before reaching the open sea, flow in harmony with the environment and through a filtering process in the lagoons.

Tam Giang lagoon is the meeting point of the O Lau river, the Bo river, and the Huong river. Once they converge, the three rivers become one. One includes the three.

Tam Giang lagoon plays the role of a filtering container that filters all sources of the water before entering the open sea.

And the Thuy Duong Range - a long and wide stretch of white sand - that runs along the coastal border confirms that a lagoon is not a sea, and a sea is not a lagoon, but a lagoon can be a sea and a sea can be a lagoon; they are linked together through the estuaries of Thuan An and Tu Hien.

The Thuy Duong Range exists in Hue as a reception and reconciliation of things that the sea does not accept from the lagoon. These things are pushed onto the shore and the Thuy Duong Range is ready to welcome all that is dirty and that is returned by the sea so as to transform it into purity.

Nature has structured Hue as such, together with the clear climate with four seasons of Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter. Therefore, from the 14th century, Hue became the body of Dai Viet, not by violence but by love. Hue once became the headquarter of the whole country, and in the reigns of Nguyen Lords and Kings,

and Hue stretched from Gia Dinh town to Ca Mau Point.

Hue obviously became then not only a political centre, but also a Buddhist, cultural and educational one.

Hue has high mountains and deep rivers, so anything shallow and low cannot exist in Hue. Hue has long rivers so anything short cannot suit Hue. Hue has Tam Giang lagoon that is considered as a filtering container, so anything impure will be rejected by Hue. Hue has a vast sea so anything narrow and mean does not belong to Hue. Hue has a long and wide range of white sand Thuy Duong, so anything dark and dirty is refused by Hue.

The spirit of rivers and mountains has created such things for Hue. So, if people living here have dark thoughts, a mean sense of purpose and uprightness, a selfish and narrow mind; if they receive everything without consciousness,

without careful consideration; if they live a life without loving-kindness, compassion, joy, detachment, and tolerance or behave improperly, they fail to return gratitude to the spirit of rivers and mountains, ancestors, and the spiritual generations of the country.

The flood happening in Hue on November 2nd, 1999, which devastated it seriously, came up with obvious reasons.

The water of the Huong river changed colour 4 months before the flood, from blue into muddy, and this revealed a bad omen for Hue.

The serious disaster happened to Hue on November 1st, 1999 (September 24 lunar year). On that day, heavy rains fell fiercely and continuously on Hue, and on the following day, i.e., November 2nd, 1999, a heavy flood overwhelmed Hue, and made Hue seriously miserable. As a result, more than 400 inhabitants were killed and missing, thousands of houses were pulled down and driven

away, hundreds of thousands of families suffered hunger and thirst, thus isolating Hue from the outside world. Mount Hai Van and Mount Phuoc Tuong had to deal with land slides. Hue suddenly became a hell of freezing, a hell of darkness, a hell of hunger and thirst, a hell of mud, a hell of bad smell, a hell of contagious diseases, etc., during terrible days. Hue experienced a state of anarchy in which inhabitants helped one another by themselves and consequently many families became really disappointed. Therefore, while they were pulled away by the flood, they clung together by tying parts of their outer clothes, or while they were still inside their flooded homes by tying themselves tightly inside so that their bodies were not pulled away when the water totally flooded their houses.

After witnessing the flood, some people said that it was because “nature was cruel to Hue”. Some others stated that it was because “nature punished Hue inhabitants”. But in my

opinion, nature never dislikes anybody. Nature loves Hue people, but the point is whether Hue people can find anything precious and lovely from Hue to love or not. In reality, Hue inhabitants did not love Hue but they only loved themselves, that is why Hue was inevitably vulnerable to natural disasters! Hue people did not take care of country fellows but of their own ambitions, and that is why Hue could not look up into the sky, or down into the rivers, or backward so as to move forward, or forward so as to develop, or around so as to make a comparison with neighboring partners.

There is no temple in Hue to worship Princess Huyen Tran, nor any school that is named after this princess, so how can Hue stand firmly in the morality of “Gratitude is the sign of noble souls”? And how can Hue foster the spirit of “Sacrifice oneself for others” so as to create distinct qualities for Hue itself?

Therefore we should carefully consider what the recent flooding warned the inhabitants and authorities in Hue for, as well as in Vietnam, as in the whole world.

If our souls are not selfish; if we do not use the general well-being to serve the personal one; if we know how to integrate individual lives into community ones; if we know how to love nature, cherish the earth, the moon and the sun, our country fellows; if we realize that our essential food is the air and the breath, and that every situation of misery and happiness originates from our souls and understanding, we certainly avoid accidents, thus preventing us from disasters.

Therefore, once a disaster happens, humans have to accept its consequences and should not blame somebody or something else. Humans have to suffer for what they have created.

If nobody takes care of his or her soul by himself or herself, persons will be permanently

poor. If each country does not open its mind to its partners around, it will fall into poverty, hunger, and backwardness in every aspect.

We should open the door of our mind with all our understanding and love, then our hearts will not beat alone, with doubt or fear. We should open the heart of Hue together, so that this heart will become the heart of the whole country. As a result, the world will understand and love Hue, since they know that once there was a Vietnamese girl who lived an unselfish life and sacrificed herself out of dutifulness to her parents and the whole country.

That noble life of the girl has formed one of the beautiful features of Hue and made contributions to create the spirit of the Vietnamese rivers and mountains.

The flood on November 2, 1999 created more estuaries such as Hai Duong, Hoa Duan, My A, Dong Duong, Hien An, etc.

But at present, the four estuaries of Hai Duong, Thuan An, Hoa Duan, and Hien An are still there. And after the flood, the people living in Hue had the chance to look inside themselves and received the conditions to contact the world outside, not by one door but by many doors. Hue is able to integrate itself into the world and the world takes responsibility for Hue. The world comes to Hue by love and Hue will then live up to that love.

(Hue, December 20, 1999)

THE LIGHT THAT NURTURES THE BLIND

People with innate blindness never see or feel the presence of the light, but the light never abandons them and is always present inside them so as to elevate them.

Similarly, in daily life, some persons suffer a defect in belief. They live in a state of doubtfulness and fear. They never see the power of self-belief and they never feel the benefits which that belief brings to them and their environment.

Even though they suffer a lack of belief, the belief possessed by the people around them assists them and elevates them, just like the light that nurtures the blind.

To the blind, you do not need to describe what the light is, and to people suffering a defect in belief, you do not need to describe what belief

is. You should only look at them when they smile, and have personal belief to help them, but in return you will receive doubtfulness, fear and slander. However, you should not be disappointed. Your personal belief will help you to overcome what the defective person has created to you!

THE SURFACE OF AUTUMN LAKES

Water of autumn lakes is mostly clear and peaceful, enabling us to see our images in it.

If we throw bricks or stones into the water, it will vibrate and splash up, and as a result, we cannot see our images in it anymore. The water may touch our faces and make us uncomfortable. Does this discomfort come from the surface of the autumn lake or from us? Does the fact that we cannot see our whole image in the water come from us or the lake itself?

Therefore, we should be careful, or we will lose that clarity and peacefulness.

DISASTER THAT HAPPENS TO US

Disaster that happens to us does not come from up in heaven or down on earth, but from our own actions.

An old tree will suffer if there are many birds in it, making its branches dry and broken.

A tall and nice tree standing at a crossroad will be disputed and destroyed.

A small tree that produces numerous fruits will be damaged and dies young because of its production beyond its strength.

Similarly, an old, respected person is often disturbed by children and grandchildren, a beautiful lady who shows her beauty improperly will suffer, and a capable person will face accidents due to working too much.

If you consider yourself a wise man, you should reflect upon the circumstances in order to

save yourself, because it will be too late if you ask for help when you are hit by an accident.

We should bear in mind that “Save yourself before Buddha or Jesus Christ comes!”

FREEDOM IN EVERY ACTION

Living a busy life, we cannot escape into a quiet and peaceful place, since the more we escape the busy life, the busier we become by such an escape.

Before we practice the Dharma, we walk, stand, lie, sit, study, eat and drink. After practicing the Dharma, we still walk, stand, lie, sit, study, eat and drink, but the action of a person who has not practiced the Dharma is quite different from that of a person who practices the Dharma.

The action of a person who has not practiced the Dharma is always mutable and leads to a hasty and mediocre life with a lot of mistakes and sufferings.

The action of a person who practices the Dharma goes from mutable to permanent, and

from the permanent moves forward. Therefore, every action of a person who practices the Dharma reveals peacefulness and disengagement, and every action of a person who practices the Dharma shows his or her control in life.

We should be free in every action and behavior of ours. These free actions bring us through the traps of sufferings!

THE SOUL PARTING FROM THE BODY

You should not think that whenever you die from a car accident or of an illness in your old age, your soul will part from your body. It is also possible that your soul is away from your body even when you are still alive. You may be in this state when you eat, drink, walk, stand, lie, sit and work by instinct. All of these activities create death in your life. Your living soul has parted from your living body.

On the contrary, if you are mindful in every action, your living soul will always be present with you. Are you not worrying about a body without a soul? You have to behave in such a way that your soul is always present in your body. Your body is your soul and your soul is your body.

You should act in mindfulness so that your

life is not attached to the axis of the earth, nor fly in the sky. If you need, you may fly, and if you want to stand firmly on earth, you can do so. Whatever you dream to be, your dream will immediately become true, by means of your action in cooperation with your mindful soul.

BEAUTY AND THE DOG WITH A RINGWORM

A beauty may shake gentlemen of every position and power in society, but when she sits beside a blind man or a dog with a ringworm, she is unable to arouse any feeling in the man or the dog.

Similarly, the profound dharma of the saints or sages hardly touches the heart of the people who are very stupid or starving because of poverty.

People who are starving because of poverty only think of food and clothes, people who are stupid only stick to their wrong views for speech and practice.

But to a wise person in life, every word of the saints or sages is like a brocade picture, and every behaviour of the saints or sages is like strings of pearls.

AN ITCHY INSECT

In each kind of flower, there are itchy insects. The more beautiful a flower is, the more itchy insects it contains.

Similarly, fame and glory in life always includes elements of jealousy, slander, and opposition.

The more a person seeks fame and glory, the more jealousy, slander, and opposition he or she may experience.

Therefore, every fame and glory in life produces itchy insects. Increasing fame and glory obviously makes itchy insects more numerous.

LOOKING AT ONE'S FACE IN A MIRROR

We often look at our faces in a mirror to see how well our faces look like, but whenever we look in a mirror we should wonder how well our minds are.

Looking at one's face in a mirror to view one's appearance is the common practice of people, but looking at one's face in a mirror to gaze at one's mind is not a common practice in our daily life, and very few persons want to do that.

But Alas! If our mind is bad and withering, how can our face be cheerful and beautiful!

If our mind is full of dirty jealousy, intentions to dispute, prejudices of loss and gains, how can our actions be calm, tolerant and full of kind-heartedness.

Therefore, small-minded persons look only at their faces in a mirror, not at their minds. On the contrary, wise persons only look at their minds not to their faces. Enlightened persons immediately see their minds whenever they look at their faces in a mirror, and they can see their faces whenever they look at their minds. Their mind and face are no longer two separate things and therefore, they look neither at their face nor at their mind, but when looking in a mirror, the mind and the face look at each other.

THE LANGUAGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

The language of enlightenment is the language that indicates the content of enlightened life. Language of enlightenment is not a verbal language but a language of how to live.

A smile, a look, a step or a clap of the hands that comes from the deep place of an awakened mind is all called the language of enlightenment.

Therefore, the language of enlightenment is not a kind of conventional language that belongs to the world of concepts, logic, and diplomacy, but rather a language without the presence of any concepts, any logic, and every empty form.

The language of enlightenment can be spoken and heard whenever there are elements of enlightenment in our minds. If there are no elements of enlightenment in our minds, what is supposed to be the language of enlightenment

that indicates what is enlightened, will certainly be an empty language!!!

DHARMA TALK: THE HEART AND THE BREATH

(Ven. Thich Thai Hoa preached at Trang Ram meditation hall for 500 kindergarten teachers on the day of their receiving flood relief gifts offered by the Section of Central Vietnam Flood Relief of Tu Hieu pagoda – Hue.)

Dear teachers,

The heart and the breath are the fundamental part of life and directly related to our life. Our heart and breath are the inheritance of the blood and spirit of our ancestors.

Therefore, our heart and breath are always present in our ancestors' blood and spirit. Furthermore, our heart and breath are also present in every human being and every species.

Therefore, when we look into our hearts, we see both the blood and spirit of our family and our

fatherland. If it were not for the fatherland, the heart would not be present. And when we look into our heart, we will see the presence of human beings and all species. If there were no farmers, how could we survive every day? Therefore, farmers who are plowing or tending water buffaloes are all present in our hearts. In our hearts there are images of teachers. If there are no images of teachers in our hearts, then our hearts are not those of a human being, but of a pig... Therefore, if we look deep into our hearts, we will see the presence of our teachers and classmates... And if we look deep into our hearts, we will see sunlight. If no sunlight were found in our hearts, we absolutely could not be present and hence could not exist. Therefore, our hearts embrace the presence of the sun.

If we look deep into our hearts, we will see the earth, nights, days, stars, rivers, mountains, oceans, and all are present in our hearts.

If we look deep into our hearts, we will see the presence of the past. If the past were not found in our hearts, we could not have the present. So, the heart is the line of life, it is linked to other elements.

Therefore, the hearts we possess at present are precious gifts that we receive and inherit from our ancestors as well as our parents. The hearts we possess at present are precious gifts from teachers and friends. The hearts we possess at present are precious gifts from nature and the human world.

Therefore, if we receive our hearts in such a way, we will know how precious they are and we will take good care of them. Since when our hearts are damaged, our ancestors and grandparents in the past will be damaged too. When our hearts are damaged, we also damage our fatherland. We must therefore do our best to look after our hearts. Since when we look after our hearts carefully, we will have healthy

and noble hearts, and we will hand over this good health and nobility of our hearts to our coming generations.

The fact that we take care of our hearts also means that we take care of our breaths, since the breath is linked to the heart. If the heart stops beating, the breath stops as well. The essential part of life is the heart and the breath. The essential part of life is the connection between humans. The essential part of life is the connection between humans and the past, humans of the present, and humans of the future. Therefore, when dealing with the dharma talk about the heart and the breath, I would like to offer a verse to the sound of the bell:

*The sound of the bell drives my afflictions
away makes my thought pure, my body peaceful,
and my smiles lively I breathe mindfully, enjoying
flowers of wisdom in every garden of the human
mind, all in the sun.*

This verse does not carry a religious message. It reveals an experiential meaning. We invite you all here to listen to the meaning of the communication between humans, the communication from heart to heart, not in the meaning of spreading a religion.

Dear teachers,

We offer you one million, two million, ten million dong, that is practical, but it is not as precious as the way we offer one another a genuine heart, a pure soul, a noble deed, a tolerant smile, an open-hearted and sympathetic look.

We can endure our hunger for food for five or ten days, but we cannot endure our hunger for belief, lack of understanding, and love, since we will fall into a mental crisis and it would end our life in a very short time. A girl or a boy may destroy her or his life due to a mental shock, an anger, or a mental hunger. Therefore, our hunger

for belief, spirit, understanding, sympathy and love is the permanent hunger. On the contrary, our lack of some million dong or some meals can be overcome, but the poverty of the soul is the permanent poverty. If we suffer poverty in understanding, we will never be able to create happiness for ourselves, and thus unable to share happiness with all species. A word from us may bring happiness to other people, and also a word from us may destroy the happiness of others.

Dear teachers, to some, the verse of listening to the bell:

The sound of the bell drives my afflictions away makes my thought pure, my body peaceful, and my smiles lively I breathe mindfully, enjoying flowers of wisdom in every garden of the human mind, all in the sun. Should not be applied, because they are not Buddhist followers. Actually, listening to the bell should be done by everybody. What for? We listen so that

we can enjoy the moment that brings us back to what we ourselves are, thus creating our control in life. We are miserable since we lose control of our everyday life. Therefore, listening to the bell is a method to regain control in life. If a person loses control in life, he or she cannot enjoy happiness! How can a person educate future generations effectively if he or she loses control in life?

Who has taken our control away? Who has taken your control away, teachers? Some of you said that it was your principal that took your self-control away. Some others believe that the authorities were to be blamed for that. We said so because we did not have a **mindful** look, which is close to the nature of the matter.

Nobody can take our control away. It is the afflictions in our minds that take our control away. It is the ignorance within our soul, not something outside us, that takes our control away.

Therefore, listening to the bell is to make our afflictions disappear. If the afflictions disappear in our mind, we will take full control of our life.

Dear teachers,

What do you have in life to make you happy? Some of you said that their husbands, who are company directors, make them happy. You are mistaken! Just take time to ask wives of directors, ministers, prime ministers to see if they are happy, or whether they are worried, fearful, and miserable. Therefore, girls who think that they have to marry men who are directors or assuming high positions in life, are mistaken about the real value of happiness. Some women said to me that having a husband and a son brings real happiness. They are mistaken too. There are many mother who are disappointed with their children and there are many wives who are disappointed with their husbands. Other women thought that houses

with many stories made them happy. How innocent they are! Please come and talk to people who are living at Tran Hung Dao street to see if they are happy? I had the chance to contact people who lived in houses with many stories, but when we met, they looked miserable due to worry, fear, and boredom. So living in houses of numerous stories does not bring us happiness. Where does happiness then come from? I also had the opportunity to meet with directors who had a lot of power, and they also revealed negative things related to their positions. They were up to their ears in work and as a result, they did not have enough time to spend with their families. The directors were so miserable, let alone their wives! Therefore, happiness does not lie in positions, in wealth, but obviously in the serene mind that is free from all afflictions. Those whose minds are free from all afflictions can enjoy happiness and peacefulness. Happiness and peacefulness are so simple, but many of us

have not recognized it, and their lives continue to be miserable.

I would like to say again, you do not need to follow Buddhism, nor Christianity, or any religion or party, but you need a pure soul, a noble mind, which is free from any affliction, so that your body is free from any disease, your understanding is clear, your love is no more ignorant and then, immediately you can enjoy happiness.

If you want a mind free from afflictions, you have to know how to make your soul peaceful. If you want a body free from any disease, you have to know how to nurture the peacefulness in your body. To achieve all of this, you should practise listening to the bell. Since the sound of the bell will drive all afflictions away, like clouds and smoke. Once all afflictions fly away, your minds become pure, peaceful, and lovely.

Once your minds are pure, peaceful, and

lovely, all clouds and smoke are beautiful too. Who can be sure that dark clouds bring sadness and white clouds reveal joyfulness! When it is too hot and dark clouds are in the sky we will feel happy, since this brings us hope. When it is too hot and white clouds in the sky we will not feel hopeful. So, no one can make sure that dark clouds bring unhappiness and white clouds happiness. Happiness and unhappiness do not come from clouds; they come from our mind and awareness. If our souls are pure and noble, everything around us is pure, noble, and lovely too.

On hearing what I said, many teachers wonder how to obtain such pure, noble and lovely souls? If you want to have such a soul, you should be in peace, and know how to listen to the bell. You have to practise following your breath so as to control yourself, and you have to nurture your heart and create substances of serenity as well as comfort, and peace for your heart. And whenever we look

at something, we should look deeply into it, and whenever we listen to something, we should listen deeply and quietly to it. It is the deep look that creates an understanding heart, and it is the deep listening that creates a peaceful heart and a comfortable breath in our daily life.

There are still many people in life who have not realized what they are and what their breath is.

We can live comfortably if we do not have husbands or wives, nor houses with numerous stories, nor high positions in life. But how can we live if we do not have breath? So, who is most faithful to you in life? Your darling? Never believe in what a boyfriend or girlfriend says to his or her partner, “I will die if I have to live without you”. In reality, that boyfriend or girlfriend is still alive, but they will all die immediately if they do not breathe. Only breath cannot be separated from us. Therefore, we only have just one lover, who is most faithful

to us all and, that is the heart and the breath. Beside the heart and the breath, others are just guests. So, those who know how to take care of their heart and breath daily have a genuine lover, who is able to look meticulously after them, every moment, 24 hours a day, during eighty or ninety years. Is there any lover who can look after us 24 hours a day? When we are alone and looking for a wife, we get excited about it. But when we are married, we will get bored being in that state after a while. Why? Because whenever we want to eat, our partners ask us to go to bed; whenever we want to go to bed, they ask us to go out for a while; whenever we want to go out for a while, they ask us to work. They become jealous and doubtful about our actions, and they betray us, thus taking any freedom from us and making our lives miserable.

So, from now on, if any person asks you who is your faithful and truthful lover, your answer will be: **the heart and the breath.**

If we know how to look after our heart and breath in the present moment, we will be able to create peace in our future life. You are kindergarten teachers. If you know how to take care of your heart and breath, you will be able to be mothers so as to deliver a healthy and pure heart and a serene breath to the future generations. Educating and transferring a piece of knowledge is not yet important, it is the transferring of a healthy and pure heart and a serene breath without anger, hatred, hurry, and excitement that matters.

By “kindergarten” we mean the mother educates her child, and at the same time it means the mother sets an example, a model, and furthermore, it means an exemplary education. What the future generations will be depends mostly on the educators of kindergarten today. Kindergarten teachers are those who are able to show what is sweet, in all honesty, with all sacrifice, and all unselfishness. If the children have some candies, you should show them how to

share them with others, so that when they grow up and become a minister or prime minister, they know how to share with everybody what they have. And you should teach them how to receive and say thanks for what is offered to them, and present and offer the gifts to their parents before using them. If you educate children in such a way, they will show to be dutiful to their parents and faithful to their country. When growing up and being in the position to assume high positions in the society, their subordinates will benefit a lot, and they show to be dutiful to their parents and faithful to their country. On the contrary, if you do not educate your children in such a way, they will not have firm moral roots regarding dutifulness and love when growing up, and if they take charge of high positions in society, they will make light of their parents and ancestors, and possibly will betray their country.

When children receive gifts, you should tell them to use half of the gifts. The remaining

should be offered to people who are poorer or needier than they are. By doing so, you raise a child whose heart is full of understanding and love, who is able to nurture that heart and when he or she grows up to act as a father, mother, husband, wife, grandfather, grandmother. Those mental substances make the child noble in his or her family, line of descent, and society.

Nobility of a person does not lie in his or her line of descent, nor in positions or power, but in his or her personality. A person who does not have personality cannot be called a human being. That is why you should practise reflecting upon yourself so as to look after your own heart and breath, and at the same time, guide your pupils to reflect upon themselves to take care of their heart and breath. Also, you should teach them who the heart and breath belong to.

Dear teachers,

Is what I have just mentioned about the heart and the breath a deliberate way of preaching Buddhist dharma or just a reality we all can see in our society?

The audience answered: “You do not preach Buddhism, you tell us a reality in life.”

That is right, the heart and the breath are a reality in our life, and it is clear that we invite you all here to show you a reality, not to preach. Buddhism does not ask anybody to spread it; Buddhism affirms its actual value by itself, not by any preacher. Truly, Buddhism does not need to be spread by anybody, just as the sun does not need anybody to spread its light or to say nice words about it. Whenever darkness is no longer present, naturally the sun will rise, bringing light to every being. Buddhism is like sunlight. Therefore Buddhism shines by itself and nobody can prevent it from shining. That is the shining of **understanding**, and that is

the shining of **love**. If anybody or any power is able to suppress Buddhism, they are able to suppress the shining of understanding and love within themselves. Similarly, if anybody or any power is able to suppress the shining of the sunlight, they naturally destroy their own life. We invite you to come here for heart-to-heart talk and through sympathetic breaths so as to share things that are of spiritual value rather than of material value. So we know that a few million dong only helps us to overcome a certain point of economic shortage, but not the whole beautiful life. We have to assist one another to realize and handle life so as to achieve the true, the good, and the beautiful. That is interesting and meaningful assistance. We assist one another just as the sun, rivers, mountains, oceans, chickens, horses, dogs, and buffalos honestly and naturally do for us.

Do you know how much a chicken helps us? Very much. A dog also helps us so much.

Why do human beings not love one another?
Why do human beings create troubles to one another? Why do human beings often raise doubts?

Do you know how a chicken is useful? Without the chicken, who could wake us up? Who could wake our mothers to prepare a pot of soup to sell at the market to earn money so that they could raise their children to study and become directors, doctors, engineers in life? So, we need chickens not for their meat but for waking up human beings when they are sleeping soundly! In the heart of directors, doctors and engineers there is partly the heart of chickens.

Are dogs not useful in our life? Dogs help us to watch over our houses, but who do dogs watch over? They watch over humans! Dogs watch over people's property, but people steal other people's property. It is clear that in our hearts there is partly the faithful heart of dogs.

Dogs know how to look after humans' belongings whereas humans steal humans' belongings. So, in the heart of a dog, there is a substance of humans' intelligence, and the heart of a thief is human but it is also inferior to the heart of a dog. Therefore, I suggest that you should reflect deeply upon the heart and the breath. Our hearts and breaths are not present naturally but they are the gifts from our ancestors, our nature and our fatherland. Therefore, a person who knows how to take care of his or her heart and breath does a very beautiful and noble job. We should know how to look after such a noble heart in the present so that we can offer it together with our precious breath to our young generations in the future.

At this significant event, we would like to offer you all such a noble heart and breath, not only cash gifts. If we offer one another only money without presenting one another a reflection on the heart and the breath, that offer merely causes trouble to all of us.

Before ending my talk, I would like to send regards of Zen Master Trung Quang - Nhat Hanh, senior master at Tu Hieu pagoda, the sangha of the pagoda, as well as Buddhist followers, associations in Vietnam and abroad, to all the people suffering from the floods at Thua Thien Hue province in particular, and in Central Vietnam in general.

They are living far away from us. It is therefore not possible for them to come here in person for the belief, and therefore, the Committee of Central Vietnam Flood Relief is authorized to hand the gifts at any cost for all the victims. In order to fulfill this sacred mission, we have made every possible effort to overcome all obstacles. And today we have the pleasure to meet the kindergarten teachers and we hope that on this occasion you will all receive our unlimited heart and breath.

Transcribed by Thai Tinh

Dharma talk:

WONDERFUL FLOWERS

(Ven. Thich Thai Hoa talked to the Buddhist group of Sudhana including 150 members at the opening ceremony of Mindfulness Practice Day at Trang Ram meditation hall, Tu Hieu pagoda – Hue)

My beloved young Buddhists, today is June 21, Canh Thin lunar year. You gathered here at *Trang Ram meditation hall* to sing and play games together in the Buddhist home. The continuing source of Buddhism through numerous generations of ancestors has created all the blessings and virtues that enable you to meet with me today. You are wonderful flowers in your parents' love and happiness, and thanks to your karmic results, you live here with plenty of blessings and peace. Your existence is the most wonderful flower on earth. Therefore, if you want to take care of the wonderful flower in yourself, you

must practise Mindfulness so as to maintain and develop the noble beauty within yourself, which has been wished for by your grandparents, parents, uncles and aunts. If you want to become a most wonderful flower on earth, you must develop the six substances as follows.

1. Dutifulness and loyalty

You are flowers that originate from your parents. You are the hope and dream of your parents and grandparents. If you do not know how to be dutiful to your grandparents and parents, you will lose their belief, and obviously you are not worthy of being a wonderful flower that beautifies your family and life upon which you depend to grow up.

2. Respect

In this life you must respect and obey your parents and grandparents, and you must know how to respect the Buddha. Because the Buddha is the place where your grandparents, parents,

uncles and aunts take refuge in spiritually to seek peace for their body and mind so that they could make money for your benefit. Your father and mother are those who hand over virtue and wisdom from your grandparents. Therefore, you must obey and respect your parents. When the two substances of virtue and wisdom are nurtured and practiced, you will create a wonderful flower in the present and a flower of human dignity in the future.

3. Understanding

You must make attempts to cultivate yourself by studying all species around you, in order to understand them thoroughly, express your gratitude and treasure what helps you to survive. If you are having a meal, you must know where the food comes from. Who gives you all the clothing? Who buys books and pens for you to do schooling? Who guides you to understand things, to understand every letter, syllable, vocabulary, and

saying? Who educates your traditions and morality so as to nurture the spirit in yourself and to respect and think lovingly of your ancestors?

4. Love

You must realize that you were born of your parents, who had to work hard to bring you up. Your body develops thanks to their physical endeavor. You should practise every time you come home from school to go to your parents and say: “Dad, Mum, thank you for bringing me up and giving me schooling.” You should hold your siblings’ and friends’ hands and say: “We exist today thanks to our parents.” You will see the joy that arises in your parents and siblings and you cannot imagine how happy they will be at that moment. So, you are wonderful flowers because you know how to understand and love.

5. Knowing how to receive

You are wonderful flowers when you know how to listen to the mistake you have made without

avoiding or denying. You know how to sit silently to receive criticisms from your teachers, relatives in your family, and elder people living around you in order to cope with the mistakes without any discomfort or anger so that you can soon become wonderful and lovely flowers. Once you are lovely flowers, you know how to use both hands and how to bow your head to receive money, sweets, or other valuable things from others. That is how you have to practise the act of receiving so as to please your parents.

6. Knowing how to share

You are wonderful flowers when you know how to share the love from your grandparents, parents, uncles and aunts with people around you, since some of your friends lost the love of their beloved ones. When they were born, they did not know who were their parents and grandparents, and they did not receive proper education, protection, and support. When your friends lack the

love from their family, they suffer a shortfall in their life and become lonely. Therefore, you should know how to smile and listen to rude words as well as cruel actions from friends. You must know how to share their unhappiness with sympathy and support. Those are substances of a wonderful flower that grows up from the soil of mindfulness in the light of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Dreams of your parents, grandparents become true, and they feel happy when they see that their children and grandchildren have obtained substances of dutifulness, loyalty, respect and understanding, know how to receive and share, realize kindness and affection from benefactors who sacrifice themselves for your benefit. This is a short, simple and gentle dharma talk for you all on the occasion of your coming to the pagoda for the first time. I hope you will practise regularly for the wonderful flowers in yourself to bloom so that you can offer them to the Buddha, grandparents, parents and your beloved ones.

Transcribed by Quang An

HOW TO BECOME AN INTELLIGENT AND EXCELLENT STUDENT?

(Ven. Thich Thai Hoa talked to the Buddhist group of Sudhana on June 29, 2000, at Trang Ram meditation hall, Tu Hieu pagoda – Hue)

Today is June 29, 2000, which is May 28, Canh Thin in the lunar year, and which is the day the Buddhist group of Sudhana practise mindfulness for the second time. I will give you the Dharma talk entitled “How to become an intelligent and excellent student”.

We all want to become an intelligent and excellent student. But what should we do to obtain such a result? We have to satisfy the following five conditions:

1. Listening attentively

If you happen to know an intelligent,

excellent scholar living somewhere, the Buddhist group of Sudhana should come and listen attentively to the lessons of that scholar. Listening attentively means listening in a very careful and serious way. If we do not seek knowledge and listen attentively, we cannot be intelligent and excellent in our study.

2. Memorizing

If we listen attentively without memorizing we cannot become an intelligent and excellent student. Therefore, we have to pay attention to the second element, which is memorizing. What we have studied and listened to should be engraved deeply in our memory.

3. Thinking

After engraving things deeply in our memory, we have to think about what we have listened to, studied, and memorized. Every day when we walk, stand, lie, sit, have meals, wash dishes, take care of our younger brother or sister

or wash clothes, we should memorize and think about what we have studied and listened to.

4. Considering

After memorizing and thinking, we have to consider what is good and what is not; what is proper for our life and what is not. After careful consideration, we only keep what is good and proper for us.

It is thinking and considering that makes each of us an intelligent person and an excellent student. If we only listen attentively without thinking and considering we are not more than a parrot.

5. Applying

What we studied, listened to, memorized, thought about and considered is applicable in our daily life. When we walk, stand, lie, sit and contact people around us, we apply all the beautiful things mentioned above, so as to bring happiness to ourselves and to everybody. And we

will become a beautiful flower, worthy of titles such as “Rosy Sunshine”, “Bluish Bamboo”, “Spring Breeze”, “Stream of Love”, “Blue Ocean”...

Therefore, if you live up to the five things I mentioned above in your life, I believe that you will become an intelligent and excellent person. You will not only please your grandparents, parents, friends, but you will also be a beautiful flower to your family and friends. You will then enjoy a very brilliant future. I am totally positive about that belief.

Transcribed by Tu Hai

ROSY CLOUDS

Dear Flower! Do you ever realize
when in full bloom, for life to behold you

Dear Afternoon! When looking at a rosy
cloud

I am dazed with my loved one in this worldly
house.

Dear Water! You remind me of my origin,
just far behind

Dear fellow people! I am thinking of your
miserable life.

Dear Truong Son Mount! You make us
warm at the beginning of autumn,

Dear East! You wake up and all the fogs are
cleared in the new sun.

Dear Myself! Stand up and move forward,
humans await, from this evil world.

MIRACULOUS LOVE

I wonder which horizon you ask me to
search

and what love could show me the way
forward

for today and tomorrow altogether

for my white shirt to be pinned with a wonder-
ful flower.

I wonder which horizon you once highly
appreciated

the sky was so high above, and the earth
stayed silent without speech;

your love travels again and again

and it is like dew in a corner of life that
remains.

I wonder which horizon you once longed

to seek

the sky was so immense, and the earth was
boundless

with no past, nor future, nor present
and I kept travelling without end.

Every love is wide open like the moon in
nature

stay in love just as I used to.

Just stay in love, but do not chase it around
since chasing is like wind and cloud.

Just stay in love, and do not chase
the more you chase, the more you become
dismayed.

Keep away from being clumsy and silly
and do not run for what is not real.

The earth is wonderful, the sky marvelous,

this is love regardless of time.

From this faithful nature you live and grow
up

this is love you should realize.

Nature's love exists without beginning
when you were born it was there in green.
So do not ask me which horizon to seek
stay in love and love is all there to meet.

So, do not ask which love is for you
stay in love just as I used to.
Stay deep in love, but never possess it
since love is so miraculous indeed!

THE FIRST LOVE

The moonlight is there by the window
arousing the novice monk to meditate for
poems.

Travelling alone back to the beginning
I come to love the romantic guy by Suchness,
sitting.

Looking back into the origin of the
Compassion stream

I was wandering and full of dreams.

Now that my love is found and real

I return the first love to what I once valued.

LETTING GO OF ROSY CLOUDS
THICH THAI HOA

Translated into English from the original

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