

**Thich Naht Hahn
Dharma Talk
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Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois**

Opening Chant. May all beings be well.

Good evening. Breathing in I feel alive. Breathing out I feel light. Enjoy your breathing.

Bell

My dear friends many of us know the art of organic gardening. We know that a garden always produces garbage. But as an organic gardener we don't want to throw away the garbage. Because we know how to transform the garbage into compost in order to nourish the flowers and the vegetables. The 20th century is a century full of violence. Bloodshed, division, hatred, we have produced a lot of garbage. And we should know how to transform the garbage into flowers and vegetables again. Those of us who know the art of transformation and healing should come together and help us handle the mass of garbage we have produced during the 20th century. It does not seem we have learned enough from the suffering we have caused during the 20th century. And we continue to make very much the same mistakes in the beginning of the 21st century. This is very alarming. Both flower and garbage are organic. If we look deeply into a flower we can see many things like the sunshine and we know very well that without the sunshine nothing can manifest.

We can see a cloud. We know that without a cloud there will be no rain and no flower. And if we continue to look we see the compost, the garbage. Without the compost, without the garbage flowers cannot grow. For those of us who know how to look deeply, we can see the garbage in the flower in this very moment. Those of us who do not want to meditate can wait just 10 days and see the garbage manifesting. A flower is on her way to the garbage because the nature of a flower is the nature of impermanence. Our love is like a flower. Our love is impermanent. If we do not know how to keep our love, our love will die. And if we know all the transformations when our love turns into hate we are capable of turning

our hate into flowers again. If the flower is on her way to becoming garbage, the garbage is also on her way to becoming a flower, if we know how because both suffering and happiness are organic. Love and hate are both organic. If we do not know how to feed our love it will turn into hatred and despair. But as a good practitioner we know how to handle the garbage which is hate fear and violence. And we can transform them back into peace and hope and love again. We all hope for a century of peace. But hoping is not enough. We have to learn the art of cultivating peace as individuals, as families, as communities, as churches, as cities, as nations. And this is possible.

When you practice breathing in you focus your attention, you might like to focus your attention on your in breath and you become your in breath. And your in breath may be very enjoyable. Breathing in I am aware that I am alive. Breathing out I smile to life. During the time you breathe in all your thinking stops. You just become aware of your in breath and if you do well you enjoy your in breath. It tells you that you are still alive! And then you breathe out, you bring your attention to your out breath and you might enjoy breathing out smiling. Because to be alive, still alive breathing in and out is a wonderful thing. And that body can no longer breathe in and breathe out. We are alive. We are capable of breathing in and enjoying our in breath. We are capable of breathing out smiling and enjoying our out breath. And if we focus our attention and mindfulness just on our in breath and our out breath, we are able to stop all our thinking and worries. Just by breathing in and breathing out mindfully I bring harmony and peace into my breath. In a sitting position or in walking meditation or lying if you enjoy your in breath and your out breath stop your thinking and just enjoy your in breath and your out breath. And in just one minute you will realize that the quality of your breathing is improved. Your breath becomes deeper, slower, more harmonious. If you continue for another one minute or two the peace, the harmony of the breath will begin to penetrate into our body and our feelings.

A breath is like a bridge linking our body and our mind. We can breathe some harmony and some peace into our in breath and our out breath. Our body and our mind will enjoy that element of peace and harmony from our breathing. Everyone can do so. We breathe in and out every day. The practice is only to go back to our breath and become aware of it. You don't need to breathe in very deeply. You don't need to breathe out

very deeply. You breathe normally. You just become aware of your in breath and out breath and allow it to be the way it is. There is no intervention. There is only mindfulness shining on your in breath and out breath. There may be tension and conflict within our body and if we know how to enjoy our in breath and our out breath and allow our body to relax we bring peace and harmony to our body.

The Buddha advised us to bring our mindful breathing to offer our body to breathing in, I am aware of my body breathing out. I allow my body to relax. This is the beginning of the practice of peace. We have worked our body too hard. We do not know how to allow our body to rest and to restore itself. It is very important to go home to our body and make peace with it and one of the wonderful ways is to practice mindful breathing to go home to our body. When you breathe in and you know you are breathing in you breathe out when you know you are breathing out, that is called “mindfulness of breathing.” Mindfulness is the energy which helps us to know what is going on and what is going on is “I am breathing in, I am breathing out.” Everyone can do that. Sitting on the grass, sitting at the foot of the tree we might like to practice this mindful breathing and smiling to go home to our breath then go home to our body and allow it to rest.

If you are driving if you arrive at a red light you have an opportunity to practice. Sit there. Smile to that light. Breathe in and smile. Breathe out and allow your body to relax. The red light is no longer an enemy preventing you to go there, but a friend helping you to stop and go back to your breath and allow your body to relax. You do not have to go to a meditation hall to practice meditation or relaxation. You can be sitting in your car and practice mindful breathing and mindful smiling. It is wonderful that we know the art of deep relaxation, total relaxation. It is wonderful if we can organize a session of deep relaxation every day, every evening in our home. The first exercise the Buddha proposed is breathing in, I know I am breathing in, breathing out I know I am breathing out. It's so simple. But if you practice according to that exercise, you can stop all your thinking you can enjoy your in breath and out breath and improve the quality of your breath, bringing harmony and peace to your breath. And then another exercise proposed by the Buddha, breathing in I am aware of my body, breathing out I allow my body to relax. To remove the tension within our body to allow our body to relax is to provide our body with an opportunity to heal itself. Our body has a natural capacity of

healing. If only we authorize our body to heal itself. If I think that only medicine can help heal the sickness in our body but if we know how to allow our body to relax, to rest, our body will know how to heal itself. In our daily life we have accumulated a lot of tension, a lot of stress, a lot of conflict into our body by our way of working, our way of eating and our way of exercising.

The practice of peace begins with our in breath and our out breath and the practice of allowing our body to relax. And then we shall be able to move into the domain of our feelings emotions. We have painful feelings; we have painful emotions. We do not know how to handle our strong emotions, our painful feelings. Many young people do not know how to handle their strong emotions. Many believe the only way to stop the suffering is to go and kill themselves. That is why so many young people in our time commit suicide just because they do not know how to handle their feelings and their emotions. We know that emotion is just an emotion. An emotion is like a storm. It comes, stays for a while and goes. Why do we have to die because of an emotion? Just because we are much much more than our emotions. We should learn how to practice mindful breathing. We should know how to practice bringing relief into our body in order to be able to bring relief to our feelings and emotions. If we know how to clean ourselves for a few hours and then handling our emotions will be possible. When you look out through the window in the time of a storm you can see the trees out there suffer, bending back and forth before the force of the wind. You may have the feeling that the tree is going to break, to be blown away every time a strong emotion comes to us. We may have the impression that we are about to crack. But if we know how to look down to the level of the trunk of the body, if we know that the tree is deeply rooted in the soil then that feeling of fragility and vulnerability will not be there. We are like a tree; we have the top of the tree which is on the level of our brain and our heart when the storm of the emotion comes and if it stays on the level of the thinking and the feeling, we might feel vulnerable, fragile. But if we know how to bring our attention down to the level of our abdomen, navel, if we know how to practice mindful breathing and pay attention to the rise and fall of our abdomen, then we'll be safe. We are with the trunk of the tree and not the top of the tree. Just focus our attention to the navel and practice deep breathing in and out and only pay attention to the rise and fall of our abdomen.

If we do this we will be able to survive our emotions, because our emotion can only stay for a while. It will have to go. If you can survive a strong emotion like that you have confidence, you know that next time when that strong emotion comes you will be able to deal with it. But we shouldn't wait until an emotion comes to begin to practice because if so we'll forget the practice. Every day we have to devote five minutes to deep belly breathing, mindful breathing and in three weeks it will become a habit. A good habit. And when a strong emotion manifests you will remember how to practice. In a lying position or in a sitting position we practice deep breathing and only pay attention to the rise and fall of our abdomen. We can very well survive our emotion and get confidence in our practice. We can help our child to learn to do it. We can hold the hand of our child and say, "Darling, let us breathe in and out together." You are channeling your energy of mindfulness and concentration to your child. And supported by you, your child will be able to breathe in and out and focus on the rise and fall of the abdomen. And if you teach the young people to do this practice, you may save their life in the future because many of the young people do not know how to handle their strong emotions.

When there is anger manifesting in us we practice mindfulness of anger. Breathing in I know that anger is in me, breathing out I am taking good care of my anger. Every one of us has a seed of anger that lies deep in the depths of our consciousness. When that seed of anger is able to sleep quietly we are able to laugh and to lead our daily life but if someone comes and says something and does something touching the seed of anger in us, that seed of anger will manifest as an energy of anger in the upper level of our consciousness and we will be inhabited by that energy of anger and we will suffer. If we do not know how to handle the anger we will allow the anger to possess us and to push us to say and do things to create suffering for us and do things to the other person or persons. That is why a good practitioner when she knows that anger is manifesting, she immediately goes back to her breathing and practices mindful breathing in order to invite the energy of mindfulness to come up and manifest. The practice of mindful breathing the practice of mindful walking generates the energy of mindfulness and you can use it to identify the energy of anger which helps you to embrace tenderly the energy of anger and bring relief to your anger. And those of us who know how to handle our anger we do not do anything or say anything when anger is in us - we always go home to ourselves practicing mindful breathing, mindful walking in order to take

care of our anger.

Mindfulness embraces anger, mindfulness is one energy, anger is another energy. Mindfulness is not fighting anger, mindfulness is just recognizing that anger is there and embraces anger in the most tender way. When your child, your baby suffers and cries you as the mother go to the room of your baby and the first thing you do is to pick your baby up and you hold your baby tenderly in your two arms. You do not know what is the cause of the suffering of your baby, but the fact that you pick up your baby and hold him or her tenderly in your arms, can already bring a relief. Your anger, your fear, your violence, you don't know yet what is the nature of it, the roots of it, but if you know how to generate the energy of mindfulness and concentration and recognize it and embrace it tenderly with the practice of mindful breathing mindful walking you can bring relief to your yowling baby which is your anger, your fear or your despair.

For those of us who are just beginners in the practice, we need a brother or a sister to assist us in difficult moments. If you live in a community of practice where there are brothers and sisters who know the practice well, and then even if your mindfulness is still weak, you can borrow, you can rely on the collective energy of mindfulness of your community in order for your pain, your sorrow, your anger to be embraced. It is wonderful to be able to allow the Sangha the community to embrace your pain, your suffering, your despair. This is a great advantage. As a beginner you may not be able to do it by yourself because the energy of mindfulness and concentration you generate may not be strong enough to identify and embrace your suffering and bring relief.

When you throw a rock into the river, no matter how small the rock is, it will sink into the bottom of the river. But if you have a boat, you can keep hundreds of stones, of rocks floating. The same thing is true with your suffering. If you are alone, if your mindfulness cannot carry the amount of suffering within you, and then you have to practice taking refuge in your Sangha, namely, in your community of practice. You allow the community to embrace your pain, your sorrow, and help you with the practice of bringing relief, transformation and healing. For anger, the community is a boat. That is why in the tradition of Buddhism, we always speak of taking refuge in the Sangha. A living Sangha, a practicing community is a body of people who daily practice generating the energy of mindfulness and

concentration. When they walk they always walk mindfully. When they drink, they always learn to drink mindfully. When they prepare breakfast for the community, they practice preparing breakfast in mindfulness. When they drive, they drive mindfully. They learn to do everything mindfully and the collective energy of mindfulness created by the Sangha is powerful enough to embrace and transform the pain in us. That is what we mean by taking refuge in the Sangha. Taking refuge in the Sangha is not a declaration of faith, it is a practice. There are many things that you cannot do alone. But in the midst of a Sangha, where everyone is doing that, this becomes very easy, very natural for us to do.

The practice of mindful breathing the practice of mindful walking the practice of mindful listening can always help generate the energy of mindfulness. With the energy of mindfulness we are capable of being fully present. Fully alive in the here and in the now and able to get in touch with the element of life. These are the elements which are refreshing, healing and nourishing that you need in your daily life for your transformation and healing. The energy of mindfulness also helps you embrace your suffering, your fear, your despair. And of course the collective energy of mindfulness generated by the community of practice will support you in the practice. Every time you organize a retreat of 500 people, 1000 people, 2000 people, every member of the retreat practices mindful breathing, mindful walking together. And that collective energy of mindfulness always supports individuals in the practice of transformation and healing. We are able to reconcile with ourselves, we are able to reconcile with our beloved ones and three days, four days, five days of our practice can already bring noticeable results.

In Plum Village, France where we live and practice, in the last four or five years we have invited groups of Palestinians and Israelis to come and practice with us. Every time a new group comes we notice they carry with them a lot of pain, a lot of anger, a lot of suffering. The collective energy of the community helps them embrace their pain, their sorrow, and brings them relief. And then they will learn the practice of deep listening, compassionate listening as a group. The practice of compassionate listening can restore communication and help us remove our wrong perceptions. And help the other group to remove their wrong perceptions. Despair, violence, hate terrorism, and war all these are born from wrong perceptions. We have wrong perceptions of ourselves. We have wrong

perceptions of them. And the basic practice of deep listening consists in removing the wrong perceptions we have of ourselves and the wrong perceptions we have of others. And this can be accomplished only with deep listening, compassionate listening and gentle speech. It cannot be done with bombs and guns. After having practiced deep listening, this group realized that the other group also suffers very deeply from despair, from anger and such violent speech. And when you understand the suffering of the other group compassion arises in yourself. Because understanding is the foundation of compassion and love. And now this group is able to look at the other group with compassion. That will make them suffer less and the other group to suffer less. The practice of removing wrong perceptions brings about understanding and compassion. And five days of practice can already make a big difference. After a few weeks of practice Israelis and Palestinians always come up as a group and have reported to us about the fruit of their practice. And all of them want when they go home to the Middle East they want to set up communities of practice, Sanghas, and invite other people to come and practice. Practicing like that you are able to remove wrong perceptions and allow understanding and compassion to flourish.

The practice of mindful breathing brings peace and harmony into our body and helps us to embrace our feelings and emotions, bringing relief to our suffering. The practice of mindfulness helps us to look deeply in order to recognize the roots of our afflictions, our anger, of our despair in the realm of wrong perceptions.

When you think of the September 11th event, you may like to ask the question, why have they done this to us? We may ask ourselves the question, what have they done such a thing to us? We may ask ourselves the question what have we done to them? What have we said to them to make them angry at us? At that point they must have suffered a lot, they must have hated us a lot, they must be very angry at us a lot to have done such a thing to us. And what is the reason why they hate us so much? They're angry at us so much - these questions should be asked.

The practice of looking deeply helps us to remember our policy, our way of life to see whether we have done something, whether we have said something to give them the feeling that we want to destroy them as a nation, as a religion, as a country. We may be able to find out a number

of details which may explain why they have hated us so much, why they are that angry with us. And if we might want to understand more, we might use the practice of deep listening to say to people over there we do not understand - Why you have done such things to us? We suffer very much. Why have you done such things to us? You must have hated us a great deal. You must have been very angry at us. You must have thought of us as evil. We want to understand why. We might have done or said something that gives you the impression that we don't like them, that we don't like you. We want you to die. We don't want you as a people as a nation as a country or as a religion. In fact, that is not our intention at all. Maybe we have done something or done something that has given you the impression that we have that intention, but in fact, we do not have it. So please, tell us why you hated us that much. Why you are so angry at us. Why have you done such a thing to us? We don't understand. So that we will not say or do things that make you suffer and if you help us to understand, we may be able to help you. That kind of speech in Buddhism is called "gentle loving speech". That can be used only when we have enough peace, enough compassion, enough understanding in us. Listening deeply like that will help us to realize that they have a lot of wrong perceptions about themselves and about us and we are also victims of our own wrong perceptions. We have wrong perceptions about ourselves and wrong perceptions about them. The Buddha suggests that the practice of compassionate listening embodied by the Bodhisatva Avalokitesvara, the practice of noble speech, gentle speech, these two kinds of practice help make communication possible to restore dialogue and that is the only way to help remove wrong perceptions. Without them we have wrong perceptions of ourselves and them and they have wrong perceptions of us as well.

In Plum Village we have helped many many couples to reconcile through the practice of deep breathing and gentle speech. Reconciliation for the willing is always possible. Sometimes three days is enough for a couple to reconcile. Whether there is husband or wife, father and son, mother and daughter – because if anyone has the seed of compassion, understanding and forgiveness in them, if they listen to a dharma talk, they can water the seeds of understanding, compassion and forgiveness in themselves and be able to use the language of loving speech which they had not been able to use before the practice.

I remember last year in Hamburg in northern Germany on the fifth day of the retreat many people came to us and reported to us that just by using the practice of deep listening they had been able to reconcile with their father. Four days of practice of mindful breathing and mindful walking and deep listening, four days of allowing the seeds of compassion and forgiveness to be watered, people become capable of listening deeply and using noble speech. And as a result they can talk to their father or their mother and can achieve wonders in just one hour of reconciliation. These people do not have their father or their mother or their partner on their retreat; if they are in a retreat the practice will be easier because both of them have been helped by the practice of selective watering.

Everyone has good seeds and bad seeds in themselves. We also have anger hatred despair and violence in ourselves. And if you have allowed the seeds of anger, irritation, hatred and despair to be watered in us everyday we will suffer very much and we will make our beloved ones suffer. That is why a couple who practices (together) always signs a peace treaty among themselves: "Darling if you really love me, please do not water the seeds of jealousy, anger or irritation in me every day. If you really love me only water the seeds of compassion, understanding and joy in me everyday." That is what we call the practice of selective watering. You might not think so, but one hour of selective watering can truly change the situation. You know the good seeds that are already there in your beloved one. You also know the bad seeds in him or in her. And if you take just one hour to water the good seeds in him or in her he or she will become transformed and will become a much more pleasant person to live with.

In a retreat of mindfulness people are exposed to the practice of positive watering. We listen and the dharma talk becomes a kind of rain penetrating into the soil of our consciousness and helps the seeds of compassion, understanding and loving kindness to grow. And the energy of compassion, understanding and loving kindness can help us to listen with compassion to the other person and help us to use the kind of speech that was impossible to use before.

Let us enjoy our in breath and our out breath to the sound of the bell. (Bell sounds)

The mass media, the journalists, the reporters - if they are calm, if they are compassionate, if they know how to look deeply, then understanding and compassion will become a reality. Then they will be able to water the good seeds in us, the seeds of understanding and compassion; otherwise they will water the seeds of fear, anger and hatred in us. It is very dangerous to water the seed of fear, of anger and create a culture of fear and anger – this is very dangerous. If we are not solid, if we are not lucid, if we do not have enough insight our policy will be pushed - it will be dictated by our fear and anger and that is very dangerous for the nation and for the world. Our political leaders should know how to practice in order to take good care of the amounts of pain, anger and frustration in their midst so that they will have enough lucidity, peace and understanding and compassion so that the policy they offer will be able to bring peace and reconciliation. If their advisors only water the seeds of fear and hate in them the policy they conduct will be characterized by fear and hate instead of peace and reconciliation.

We have elected our leaders in the congress, in the government and we want them to have enough insight and wisdom in order to conduct the kind of policy that can bring safety and peace to our nation and the world. We have to continue to support them and to support their advisers. We have to become their supporters and their advisers. If you have the insight as to how this can be realized, you have to support your congressman; you have to support your government by providing them with that insight. It is my conviction that there are enough enlightened people in America who are aware of the fact that violence cannot solve the problem of terrorism, that violence cannot reduce the number of enemies or terrorists, that violence continues to create more hatred, more violence and more terrorists. (sustained applause) We have to practice as a nation we have to practice deeply in order to bring about a collective awareness, a collective enlightenment, a collective awakening. That if we continue the path of violence it will repeat the same mistakes that you had in the past. I am thinking of the Vietnam War. During the Vietnam War many Americans believed that if South Vietnam falls into the hands of Communism then that will be a threat to the safety of America. That other countries had to enter into the war in order to fight Communism, to conduct strategies of search and destroy. The Communists may hide themselves in Cambodia, the Communists may hide themselves in North

Vietnam, in Laos. We have to go to these countries to search and destroy them. But as the war went on more Communists, more anti-American feelings were created. Millions of Vietnamese civilians and millions of other people died because of the war. Half a million American soldiers were in Vietnam and fifty thousand soldiers died in Vietnam. And now many of us now realize that the Vietnam War was absolutely useless. Vietnam now is a communist country. It is not a threat to America. Both countries are trading with each other. We have created garbage during that twentieth century and we have not been able to transform this garbage into the flowers of peace and understanding. Those of us who are awakened, who have light should come together and voice our concern and offer the nation, offer the country a way out.

All my life I have practiced Sangha building. I really practice taking refuge in the Sangha.

The Sangha is a community where everyone has the intention to practice transformation and healing. And therefore they are able to cultivate brotherhood and joy. You can offer the practice to many other people. Sangha is a refuge. Sangha is a place where people practice listening deeply to each other helping each other to embrace their pain and sorrow for the sake of transformation and healing. I am thinking of Congress as a Sangha. Our congressmen should be able to sit down together as brothers and sisters and listen to each other deeply. They are not just there to fight for their own ideas, their own power. Because if these congressmen and women behave with insight, with experience, the practice of deep listening of many members of congress will help us to bring about the collective insight that will be the foundation of the kind of decision that will allow us to help the countries and the people in this difficult situation.

Five years ago I was in India, visiting the chairperson of the national assembly of India, Mr. Narayanan. He was the vice president of India. I discussed with him about the practice of deep listening and loving speech in the congress. He was very attentive. I proposed to him these kinds of things that we do in our community. In the beginning of each session you meditate with a few lines of reading. The people who have elected us into the national assembly expect us to listen to each other deeply in order to combine our insights so that we can make the best kind of decisions for the nation. So let us listen to each other calmly and with compassion so

that everyone can learn from all the other members of the community. And every time the atmosphere of the national assembly becomes hot, people begin to shout at each other, then the chairperson will invite the bell of mindfulness to sound and only when the atmosphere is calm and the speaker is invited to continue – and Mr. Narayanan accepted these kinds of suggestions. Ten days after my visit he set up a committee in the congress taking care of that.

I have been thinking of the United Nations as a Sangha. We need a body where all nations can be represented. One nation should have the opportunity to tell all the other nations about her own sufferings, difficulties and deep aspirations. If it is exactly like our community of practice, every brother and sister listens to you in order to understand your suffering, your difficulties and your deepest aspirations and offer you ideas and suggestions for practice so that we can transform and heal. So every member of the United Nations should have the capacity of telling the other members about his or her own suffering, the situation of his or her own people. And when there is good communication, when there is collective insight then the United Nations will become very effective in bringing reconciliation and peace to many areas of the earth. Otherwise if we keep fighting for our own ideas in the name of national interests it will not become a real Sangha of all nations. The human family as a family should be able to help with individual nations. When two brothers are fighting and killing each other, other members of the family should come and intervene and prevent the two brothers from fighting and killing each other and find ways in order to settle the dispute. That is very natural and that is the role of the United Nations as a Sangha of all nations. When we think of the Middle East, the two brothers are always fighting each other because the other side is always there to cause the suffering to us. We have to punish and there is an escalation of punishment and suffering. And the family of all nations has allowed the situation to drag on too long.

The United States of America is a mighty nation with plenty of facilitators. It is my hope that the U. S. will invest in the United Nations and make it a true body for peace keeping. Anyway the United States of America is just one member of the United Nations. We should invest in the United Nations, we should empower the United Nations so that she will become a real power for peace keeping and not just trying to manipulate the organization for our own interests. (sustained applause) I

believe that if President Bush has good advisers, advisers who have good insight, who have the capacity of deep listening, and loving speech the seed of enlightenment, the seed of compassion, the seed of understanding in him will grow very fast and he will be able to help us out of this situation. Suppose President Bush practiced using loving speech (applause), suppose he said “Dear people we are sorry we have had wrong perceptions. We have not found any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. (applause) But we have helped remove an unpopular regime. Now we would like to hand over the situation in Iraq to the community of responsible nations. We will participate in helping and looking deeply to help Iraq recover, to rebuild and to become a democratic country.” If President Bush can do like that and then America will not have to occupy Iraq for a long time and every nation will applaud America as having the insight of peace and reconciliation. America can just not do everything. She has to count on other nations to take care of the well being of the earth. It is my conviction that there are more than enough intelligent and enlightened Americans with compassion and understanding. If they consent to come together and voice their concern very strongly and show us the light and then not only can their people profit from their light but the whole world.

Many of us are very confused in these times. We live in confusion and uncertainty. Sometimes I think that confusion might help because if we are too sure that our way is the only way to bring peace to remove terrorism we may continue to make a lot of mistakes and continue to bring about suffering. To be confused means you have the power to look deeply and to touch the truth deeply. We are all invited to bring calm and lucidity and to look deeply in order to recognize the roots of our afflictions, fear and pain. Individualism prevailed during the twentieth century and people were looking for happiness as individuals in the direction of fame, power, wealth and sex. They believed that without these, happiness would be impossible. But if we practice looking deeply around us we will see that there are people who have these things: power, sex, fame and wealth but they suffer very deeply – they are very lonely, full of fear, full of despair and many of them have committed suicide. And yet there are many of us who do not have these things, who live a very simple life and are able to smile all day. They have enough understanding and compassion within themselves. They can relate so easily to others and to other living beings, they can offer their time, their energy their love to the

people around them. If we can help to bring about that kind of awakening, that kind of enlightenment and then people will no longer rush into the direction of fame, profit, power and sex and to think that that is the direction for true happiness.

According to the teaching of the Buddha, life is available only in the present moment. If you are able to go into the present moment, be in the now, you will be in touch with many wonders of life and you will recognize that you have more than enough conditions to be happy right here and right now. The Buddha confirmed that happiness is possible right here and right now if we are not carried away by our regrets concerning the past or our fears concerning the future. Go back to the present moment – you will have the conditions to be in touch with true life. The Buddha said the past is already gone; the future is not yet here. There is only one moment for us to realize and that is the present moment. The address of life is here and now. If we go home to the present moment we will get in touch with the many conditions for true happiness that are already there and we will be in touch with the wonders of life that are refreshing, healing, nourishing and if we can taste that happiness then we will be able to release that idea that only fame, sex and power can bring happiness.

To me the Kingdom of God is available in the here and the now and it is possible to enjoy walking and being in the Kingdom of God. The blue sky, the beautiful mountains, the beautiful rivers, the flowers, the trees, the lovely faces of children – all of these belong to the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God, as Andre Gide said, is happiness and He is available twenty-four hours a day. If God is available twenty-four hours a day, his Kingdom is also available. The question remains whether we are available to the Kingdom. In Buddhism we do not speak of the Kingdom of God but the Pure Land of the Buddha which is the same thing. The wonders of the Pure Land – you do not have to go to the West in order to get in touch with – they are really present in the here and the now. If you can free yourself from your sorrows concerning the past and your fearfulness concerning the future, if you know how to go home to the present moment and get free then you can penetrate into the Pure Land of the Buddha. And happiness becomes possible right here and right now. If the Church is our temple it affords us this kind of teaching which addresses the real problems of our time and speaks to us about our anguish, our fear and our despair then we will be able to practice to get

transformed to enjoy the wonders in the here and the now and we'll be able to stop the forces of destruction.

The practice of mindful consumption is very crucial. Many of us believe that happiness lies in the belief that you can consume a lot. But most of the items we consume every day bring a lot of toxins and poisons into our body and mind. We consume a lot of violence, a lot of fear, a lot of despair in our daily life. We allow our children to be intoxicated by the poisons of fear, violence and anger. It is time for us to seek the way of peace. To organize, to create the kind of environment where we are protected from the invasion, from the assault of these poisonings. Our congressmen should practice deeply looking into the nature of our fear, our suffering, our pain and offer us the kind of love that forbids the manufacturing of items of consumption that continue to bring fear, craving, hatred and violence into our body and into our consciousness. In the name of freedom they want to get rich by offering us these items of consumption that are full of poisons. That is why we should try to organize our daily life to offer ourselves and our children a milieu of living where we can feel safe, not assaulted by these poisons. This is very crucial. We have to rebuild our families, we have to rebuild our schools. Our family and our school should be the place where we practice selective watering, so that the seeds of hatred and fear will not be watered anymore – instead the seeds of joy, peace, understanding and compassion will have a lot of chances to be watered and educated. Politicians, journalists, we all have to come together and have a discussion as to how to reorganize our way of daily life. There is no way to peace - peace is the way.
(sustained applause)

Sister True Emptiness will offer you a song of practice.

I smile to the star that still shines in the sky,
To the sun that slowly guides us out of the night,
To the day that begins to the enchanting world,
I smile to the world and the world smiles to me.

I smile to the child that crosses my way,
I remember also all those who are hungering,
All those who live in misery all over the planet,
Who have to face the world having lost their mother.

If sometimes my smile is moistened by tears,
When I see the great pain that spreads over the world,
I shall still be smiling with tears in my eyes,
Smiling to life, smiling to them.

And one day will come when it is bitterly cold,
When even my footstep will not leave any marks,
The never-ending current of life's energy will carry me along,
And I will not look back.

The fear will no longer block my way,
My heart will finally open very wide,
Then I will become the smile of the earth,
The smile of the flowers of the sun of the rain and the wind.

And one day perhaps in a very small child,
I will open my eyes to the wonders of life,
And a little a more loving and a little more smiling,
I will continue this wonderful way.
And one day perhaps in a very small child,
I will open my eyes to the wonders of life,
And a little more loving and a little more smiling,
I will continue this wonderful way.

Sister True Emptiness repeats the above song in French.

Transcribed by Jerry and Judy Woods, Lakeside Buddha Sangha

