

Touching the Ultimate Dimension

Notes from the lectures of Thich Nhat Hahn, October, 1993.

From Tuesday evening, October 17th, 1993

Welcome, my friends. Something tells me that this is going to be a very happy retreat. We have come together to make this event possible. The sangha is there, and each of us will contribute in our own way to the making of the happiness of the whole sangha. Tonight I will only offer you some instructions of walking meditation. And walking meditation not just one time a day, but all day, and during five days. Every time we need to move from one place to another, it's walking meditation that we practice. We always walk mindfully, touching the ground mindfully.

To me this is enough to make the retreat happy, this practice alone. As we are going to enter into the realm of the Avatamsaka, and the Lotus Sutra, walking is so important. In order to enter the realm of Avatamsaka, in order to enter the realm of the Lotus Sutra, we need our feet to walk in.

You have learned the short poem, 'I have arrived', 'I am home' - use that in order to walk. When you breathe in you make two or three steps. Listen to your lungs, to see whether they want two or three steps when you breathe in.

You give them exactly the number of steps they want. And if it is two steps, you say, silently, 'I have arrived', 'I have arrived'. And if you make three steps when you breathe in, you say, 'I have arrived', 'arrived', 'arrived'.

And during that time you practice arriving, body and mind.

We arrive in the here and the now. And when you breathe out you practice, 'I am home', 'I am home', 'home'. And you repeat that for a number of times, 'arrived', 'arrived', 'arrived', 'home', 'home', home'. And you feel happy.

You feel that you have arrived. You feel that you are home. You don't need to rush. You are doing it well, correctly. And you know by yourself. You don't need anyone to tell you that you are doing it correctly.

And after some time later, one or two or three minutes, you switch into the second line, 'In the here', 'In the here', 'In the now', 'In the now'. It is exactly the same kind of practice, but you use other words. Maybe when you say

'I have arrived', 'I am home', you have only arrived sixty percent. And now when you practice, 'In the here', 'And the now', you arrive more, maybe eighty, or ninety percent. And it may happen right away that you arrive one hundred percent, that's wonderful.

And after, say, one or two or three minutes, you switch into the third line, 'I feel solid', 'solid', 'solid'. 'I feel free', 'free', free'. And if you really feel solid, and if you really feel free, you have truly arrived, you are truly home. So the third line is exactly the same practice also.

And the fourth line, 'In the ultimate, I dwell', I will not explain it now. Maybe after tomorrow. But, it means at least the same thing.

In France, I used to give the children a very short gatha, only two words, for practicing walking meditation. These two words are, 'Oui', 'Merci'. When they breathe in they say, 'Oui', 'Oui'. Well children, they don't line to breathe too long, so two steps are enough. 'Oui', 'Oui', it means 'Yes', 'Yes'. 'Oui', 'Oui'. They learn how to say yes to the earth. It's nice. It's very important to be able to say yes to life, to say yes to people, to say yes to the earth. And when the breathe out, they say, 'Merci',

'Merci'. It means thanks. And they love it. It's quite easy. If you want to try it, you are welcome. You try it in French, or in English.

When you practice walking, bring your attention down to the level of your feet. Pay attention to the contact between your feet and the ground. Do not stay here, on this level, in order to stop the thinking. This is not the time for thinking, this is time for touching, touching the earth with your feet. So walk, and touch the earth with your feet. Breathe like you breathe with your feet. And pronounce the key words like you pronounce them with your feet.

'Oui', 'Oui', 'Merci', 'Merci',

'I have arrived', 'arrived', 'home', 'home',

'here', 'here', 'now', 'now'.

Concentrate on the sole of your feet. Walk as if you kiss the earth with your feet. And if you feel pleasant, smile, your pleasure will be doubled. Any time you need to move from one place to another place, whether that is only a distance of five, or ten steps, practice walking meditation. Give yourself enough time in order to do that. And enjoy walking.

Do not intervene with your breathing. Do not force your breathing. Do not say, 'My breathing, come here, I will work you out.' Don't say that.

Allow your breathing to be natural. Just touch your breathing with your mindfulness. 'Breathing in, I know I am breathing in', 'Breathing out, I know I am breathing out.' Use the energy of mindfulness to touch your breath.

Do not try to bend, to force your breath. Do not make any effort. Just enjoy breathing in, breathing out. And when you practice walking, you coordinate your breath with your steps. And, the most important thing is to enjoy walking.

It may be because of your habit energy that you lose your mindfulness, and you want to think of something in the future, and you forget about the practice of

walking. You don't enjoy walking very much. You are sucked to the future. But around you there are many people, many hundreds of brothers and sisters in the Dharma, who are walking deeply, serenely, smiling, and enjoying every step they make. So you are rescued. Because everyone around you is doing it, it's so easy for you to go back, in order to continue walking in mindfulness. That is the advantage of practicing in a sangha. Sangha means a community of practice. We may lose our mindfulness several times a day, but we are always rescued by the presence of the sangha.

So if it happens that you lose your mindfulness, you get into the thinking, and then a brother, or a sister, by his way of walking, her way of breathing, will bring you back to your mindfulness. And that is why I always say that the main event of a retreat is the coming together of a sangha. 'I take refuge in the Sangha', that is our practice.

There are things that seem to be difficult when we do it alone. But, in a sangha, surrounded by other brothers and sisters in the Dharma, these things become so easy to do.

So walking meditation, we'll practice each day, one time together. We'll walk about forty-five minutes, or one hour every day, as a sangha. But, throughout the day, any time we need to move from one place to another place, you are going from your tent to the Dharma Hall, always practice walking meditation. Please do. I'll do my best. And I count on you. Enjoy doing that. Take time to do that. It's very important, you'll see.

Whether you are in the presence of the Sangha, or whether you are walking alone, or in your room, the Sangha is always there. I am always there. And you feel that you are supported by the Sangha, all the time. Walk with the awareness that everyone is aware of your walking. And this is a support.

In the Jewish tradition, you prepare a communal meal, a family meal, in the

kitchen. You do everything in the presence of God. You pour the tea, you set the table, you offer the food, you do everything like in the presence of God. God is aware of every gesture that you make.

In Christianity, during the Last Supper, the twelve disciples ate the bread and drink the wine in the presence of Jesus. He is there, he was there, he is there. And you drink, and you eat, in his presence.

So during this retreat, every time you need to make a step, please be aware that we are all with you. Our mindfulness, our awareness is always there to support you.

Do not lose any step. Every step should be mindful. Every step should be enjoyable.

During walking meditation, from time to time you hear a bell, the sound of the bell. We may like to stop together, stop walking, in order to be aware of the blue sky, the trees around, the song of the bird. We practice touching these wonders around us and inside of us. We touch the community of brothers and sisters who are there with us.

And this touching will nourish us, will help us. We learn that the deepest kind of touching is with mindfulness. And walking means to generate the energy of mindfulness, in order to touch the earth, to touch the sky, to touch the wonders around us. That is possible in the present moment, in the here and the now. And therefore we should be there in order for the touching to be real and to be deep. That is why the practice of arriving, arriving home, arriving in the here and the now, is very good for walking meditation.

And you know, if you like it, if you enjoy it, it's pleasant, it means we are doing it correctly.

I think we need to go to sleep, so I will stop here.

Let us enjoy a few sounds of the bell.

Wednesday morning, October 18th, 1993

Good morning, everyone. It is very important to learn how to sit beautifully. We know that we cannot be happy unless we are peaceful. And to practice in order to be peaceful is very important. We like to sit next to someone who is peaceful and happy. And that is why we should train ourself to be peaceful, to be pleasant, for the happiness of many other people. So let us sit beautifully, like a flower, and become very peaceful, very pleasant, for ourselves, and for the other people around us.

When I was nine, when I as nine years old, I happened to see the drawing of a Buddha, on the cover of a Buddhist magazine. I was very impressed. The artist drew the Buddha sitting on the grass. And he sat so beautifully, very relaxedly. I was very inspired. I was so impressed, just by looking at the Buddha sitting.

Around me, at that time, remember I was nine, people did not look very peaceful, not very relaxed. And that is why it's so wonderful to see someone sitting peacefully, relaxedly, smiling quietly. And as a little boy, nine years old, I wanted to become someone like the Buddha, just by looking at the drawing of the Buddha.

I think you would like to draw a Buddha like that too. You may use a pencil, a sheet of paper, and you draw the Buddha sitting on the grass, beautifully, very refreshing, smiling. Shall we do that today? I guess when you draw the Buddha, sitting, peacefully, you have to sit peacefully, also, in order to do that. And if you draw the Buddha beautifully, please bring and show us tomorrow.

It was at nine, at the age of nine, that I began to touch the Buddha, to touch the Buddha through the drawing by someone. I think the artist was good. That is why he was able to draw a Buddha that can inspire children. And I am very thankful to him, or to her, I don't know the artist, the name of the artist. Still today I still feel grateful to the artist who had drawn the Buddha. I saw it on the cover of a Buddhist magazine. Just looking at the Buddha, sitting quietly, smiling, refreshing smile, I was very inspired. And I wanted to become someone like him.

About two years and a half later, I was on my way to be twelve, I had the opportunity to climb a mountain in the northern part of my country, Vietnam. The name of the mountain is Na Shun. I was very excited, because I had learned that there was a hermit living on the top of the mountain. I had never seen a hermit, but I knew that a hermit is someone who wanted to become a Buddha. And he is practicing in order to be calm, to be refreshing, to be loving. And I wanted to meet him. We were about two or three hundred, maybe two hundred and fifty boys and girls.

We belonged to a school, elementary school. And we were organized in teams of five. And we were given the order to prepare our lunch. Most of us had rice balls and sesame seeds to bring with us for a picnic. And we were told to bring a few bottles of water. And together with four other boys, we begin to. We started in the very early morning.

At that time I did not know anything about walking meditation, so I walked so fast. And when we arrived at the foot of the mountain, we were very eager to climb. and we climbed very quickly, and we got very tired, halfway to the top of the mountain. And we drank all our water. That is because we did not know what is walking meditation. Now I know much better how to climb a mountain, without getting tired.

About six or seven years ago we climbed the Grita Kuta mountain, where the Buddha had lived and practiced with his monks. And we applied walking meditation to climb.

It was a very wonderful trip, because we walked very slowly, enjoying breathing in, and breathing out. And every fifteen minutes, we stop. We contemplate the beautiful landscape, and we hear a mini-Dharma talk, about five minutes.

And after that we feel very refreshed, and we started climbing again. And when we arrived at the top of the Grita Kuta mountain, we visited the foundation of the hut of the Buddha. It was a wonderful time. And we did not feel tired at all, because we had learned walking meditation.

But when I was eleven and a half, I did know about that.

So we drank up all our water, and that is why when we arrived at the top of the mountain, we were very thirsty. But the worst thing, to me, is that people told us that the hermit was not there. I was very disappointed. I did not tell anyone about my secret hope of meeting the hermit, because my friends were not interested in meeting the hermit, only me. And that is because, more than two years ago, I had seen the drawing of the Buddha on the cover of a Buddhist magazine.

In my little head, I thought that a hermit must be someone who wants to live alone, at least for some time. And he did not want to see so many people, especially a huge crowd of schoolboys and girls, who are not very quiet. And I thought that he may be somewhere there, hiding himself. So while the other boys unpacked the lunch, and prepare for the picnic, I set out alone, and searched for the hermit. I believed that he was hiding somewhere there, and if I had some luck, I'd be able to find him.

So, I began to climb. On my way I saw the hut of the hermit. I told myself the hermit was not there, but his hut is there. If I take a look inside, it will be a kind of comfort. So I went close to the hut of the hermit, and I peered into the hut. And guess what I saw. Maybe I should not tell you. I saw our schoolteachers there, eating sweet rice and roast chicken. Roast chicken. Now all of us students, pupils, we only have rice balls and sesame seeds.

And our teachers had, sweet rice is very luxurious kind of rice, and also roast chicken. We don't mind they ate chicken, but it is an offence. It's not nice to eat

non-vegetarian things in the hermitage. That is what shocked me. Because a hermit is supposed to be someone who is living very frugally, and using only vegetarian meals. I was disappointed. And then I left the hermitage and I continued my climb.

A few minutes later, I hear the sound of water, dripping. It's very beautiful. It was a very beautiful kind of sound. And suddenly I had the idea to follow the sound, and go. And about five minutes later, I discovered something truly wonderful. It was a very beautiful well, very natural, a natural well, made of stones. And the water is high, and very limpid, very clear. I could see all the details in the bottom of the well. And you know, I was very thirsty.

And the water looks very refreshing, inviting. So I kneeled down, and I scoop the water in my two palms, and I begin to drink. You could not imagine, you cannot imagine my happiness. It's so delicious, so refreshing. And I felt that I was completely satisfied. I did not feel any desire left in me, even the desire of meeting the hermit. It's a very wonderful feeling, the feeling of bliss, that you don't desire anything more.

I had the impression, I had the feeling, the idea that the hermit has, had, transformed himself into a well in order to meet me privately. Well, when we are young, ten year, eleven year old, we think like that. And it may be true.

Adult may not believe things like that, but things like that may be true. I believed that the hermit had transformed himself into a well so that I could meet him privately.

And after having drunk the water from the well, I felt completely satisfied, happy. I did not want anything else. I sat down, and then I lied down and looked at the blue sky. I hear the sound of the wind. I hear the sound of the water dripping into the well. And I saw a few leaves. So wonderful. And I fell asleep. I must have slept very soundly, very deeply, because when I woke up, I did not know where I was. Although the sleep did not last very long, maybe three, or four minutes, I don't know exactly now. But I found out very soon where I was, on the top of that Na Shun mountain, and that my friends were waiting for me,

down there, for lunch.

So with a lot of regret, I had to abandon the well, and begin to climb down. And during that time a sentence came to my mind, to my heart. This sentence is this: 'I have tasted the best water in the world.' 'I have tasted the best water in the world.' It's like a line of poetry, written by an eleven year old boy. And when I arrived, I found the four other boys, I did not tell them of my experience. I didn't know why. It seemed that I wanted to keep it as a secret, the meeting with the hermit as a secret. It's so sacred, something so wonderful, that you have the impression that if you talk about it, you can make it less beautiful. So I did not tell anyone of my discovery, of the well. Only, the only thing I felt, very clearly, is that I was satisfied.

And I had the feeling that my wish had been fulfilled, meeting the hermit.

Last year, a group of us went to Russia, to Moscow, and offered a retreat. We practiced walking meditation in the park, and there were children who joined us in the practice of walking meditation, also. And then we went to Poland, offering another retreat, and then we went to Prague, a very beautiful city, that remained intact after the war. Prague is a very beautiful city. I hope one day you will be able to go and visit that city.

Sister Chan Kung, myself, and many other brothers and sisters, including Arnie and Terese, we went to the city one day, one very beautiful morning, and we practiced touching the city with our mindfulness, 's so beautiful. We were practicing walking meditation on small and beautiful streets in the city. Suddenly I hear the church bell ringing. I had heard the church bell before, hundreds of times, but this time, so different.

While the church bell is ringing like that, and I was standing there, enjoy breathing in and out, and listen to the church bell, suddenly I hear another kind of sound, the sound of the dripping water, that I had heard during my trip up to the mountain of Na Shun. It is like the sound of the dripping water was responding to the sound of the church bell. It's wonderful. And suddenly I felt that I was able to touch the soul of ancient Europe.

I had been in Europe for many years, but that was the first time when I was able to touch deeply the soul of Europe, through the church bell. And thanks to the sound of the dripping water, that I had heard when I was eleven, almost twelve.

It was the sound of the dripping water that allowed me to receive the sound of the church bell. It is the image of that wonderful, beautiful well that allowed me to see the beauty of Europe. And the image of the well as the sound of the dripping water are still alive in me. And I can touch them, any time I want.

I think all of you would feel the same. You may have seen your well, your beautiful well. You may have heard already the sound of dripping water. And the image of the well in you is still alive, is still beautiful. And we should try everyday, to touch it. Maybe, it is not a well that you have touched. It may be something else, but equally beautiful, equally marvelous. You may have seen a rock, or a beautiful tree, or a beautiful sunset, or a little boy, or a little girl, that touched you as deeply as the well had touched me.

If we are mindful, we'll be able to touch it every time we want. It is the image of the well, the sound of the dripping water, that continues to nourish me, through many, many years. And don't think that you have not touched your well. Don't think that you have not touched the dripping water. You have, in a different way, a different age.

So, the assignment for you today is to draw something. Draw something that you have touched, something that you think to be the most beautiful thing that you have touched.

It may be your mother. It may be your grandpa. It may be a beautiful rock, that you visited, or beautiful tree, but draw it with all your heart, on a piece of paper. 'The most wonderful thing I have touched'. That is the subject of your practice today. And if the adults want to practice, they are welcomed to do that also.

And then Brother Fa Don, and other brothers and sisters will teach you how to practice pebble meditation, today. Pebble meditation is a wonderful practice of meditation. Each of you will have to go and look for five pebbles, the most beautiful pebbles you can find around here. And the brothers and sisters will tell you how to do it, so you might make a demonstration to the Sangha tomorrow, or maybe after tomorrow. Pebble meditation. So now this is the end of your Dharma talk. When you hear the sound of the bell, please stand up, breathe in and out three times, and bow to the Sangha before you go out and practice. (bell)

Only the young people. When you practice breathing in and out three times, and you bow to the Buddha, and then you turn around and bow to the Sangha. The Sangha means everyone. Bow to the Buddha. And you turn around and bow to the community, the Sangha. And now you practice walking meditation, going out, peacefully, and mindfully. You go with Brother Fa Don there.

Mindfulness practice is the kind of practice that allows us to enter the realm, the wonderful realm of the Avatamsaka. There is a lot of light, of space, of flowers, of joy, of peace, of lovingkindness in the realm of Avatamsaka. And the realm of Avatamsaka is available to us, at any time. We need only to use the energy of mindfulness in order to step into that world, where you can meet the Buddhas, the bodhisattvas, and all the wonderful things. It is possible to do that in this very retreat.

But in order to prepare for that journey, or that penetration, we need some practice, its name is mindfulness. Without the energy of mindfulness you cannot enter into that realm, the wonderful realm of the Avatamsaka. Mindfulness is the capacity of being aware of what is happening in the present moment. And we are all capable of being mindful. Everyone has a seed of mindfulness in himself, or herself. In our daily life, we may live in forgetfulness. We walk, and we don't know that we are walking; we eat, we don't know that we are eating; we drink, we do not know that we are drinking. We do things without being mindful.

However, the seed of mindfulness is always there, alive.

The moment when we touch the seed of mindfulness in us, it begins to grow, and it begins to generate the energy of mindfulness. And the energy of mindfulness is light. It has the power of shining and showing us... It shows us the way, it shows us how to look deeply into the heart of reality. And you know that everyone is capable of being mindful, of practicing mindfulness.

When we drink a glass of water, and if we know that we are drinking a glass of water, if we are concentrated on the fact that we are drinking water, mindfulness is already there. And the water drinking becomes deeper, truer, and real. When we walk, and if we are aware of each step we make, 'I walk and I know I am walking', mindfulness is there. And walking like that makes life true, possible. And mindfulness is there. When you sit, and if you are aware that you are sitting, mindfulness is there. And this, everyone of us can do.

And if you want to do it all day, we need the presence of a Sangha, to remind us. That is why in a retreat, we walk together, we eat together, we sit together. We support each other in the practice.

Mindfulness, as I said, is the capacity of being aware of what is there, of what is happening in the present moment, in the here and the now. And it is the opposite of forgetfulness. It is the opposite of distraction.

When you have mindfulness, you are concentrated, you are truly there, you live deeply the moment of your daily life. That is why we can say, first of all, that mindfulness is the kind of energy that helps us to be there, to be truly present, in the here and the now.

In our daily life, in the state of distraction, forgetfulness, our mind and our body are not together. Our mind may be in one direction, and our body on another direction. We may be sitting there, but we are not truly there. Our beautiful child is coming, smiling a wonderful smile, she needs all our attention, but we are not there.

We are absorbed into our thinking. We are caught in our projects. We are overwhelmed by our worries, our anger. We get lost into the past or the future. So our child is disappointed, because we are not there for him, for her. That moment, we are not available to our child, and our child is not available to us. We miss the beautiful smile of our child. In the state of forgetfulness, we miss everything. Life is not possible. And therefore, the practice of mindfulness is to bring yourself back, to life, to the present moment, because life can only be found, and touched in the present moment, that is the Buddha's teaching.

In a discourse called 'The Sutra on the Better Way to be Alone', the Buddha advise us to go back to the present moment, to touch the present moment in order to touch life. And that is the oldest, the most ancient text on the art of living in the present moment, Bhaddekaratta Sutta, 'The Sutra on the Better Way to be Alone'.

To be alone here does not mean that you cut off, you are cut from society. You may be surrounded by many people, but you are really there, you don't get lost in the past or in the future, or in your afflictions. Even if you go to the forest and live alone, but if you are possessed by your worries, if you get lost in the future or in the past, you are not truly alone, you are with something else. And that was the idea, the teaching of the Buddha.

Life can only be touched in the here and the now. The here contains the now, and the now contains the here. And that is why the practice is to go back to the present moment, in order to touch life. Life has so many wonders within it, and if we do not go back to the present moment, we never touch life with all the wonders. Our appointment with life is in the present moment. If we miss the appointment, life is not for us. And that is why the practice of mindfulness is, first of all, the practice of being back to life and touch life in the present moment.

Between the body and the mind there is something else that links the two things,

that is our breathing. When we touch our breathing, 'Breathing in I know I am breathing in', 'breathing out, I know I am breathing out', our mind and body begin to come together. We don't need to practice very long. We need to breathe in and out mindfully, one time, two times, in order for our mind and body to come together. Everyone can do that, including the very young people. And the fruit of the practice is called 'the oneness of body and mind'. It can be obtained just after five, ten seconds.

You are distracted, you are not there, suddenly you go back to yourself and you make yourself present, in the here and the now, ready to touch life, ready to be aware of what is going on. That is the practice of mindfulness. First of all, maybe thanks to the practice of walking, or the practice of sitting, or the practice of breathing in and out, you bring your mind and body together, and you attain the fruit of the oneness of body and mind. You make yourself available to life, and you make life available to you.

Now you are truly there, you child, and her wonderful smile are for you, you open your arms, and you hug your child, 'Breathing in, my child is there, beautiful, refreshing, breathing out, I feel so happy'. Hugging in that way is called hugging meditation. And you may continue to breathe in and breathe out, in mindfulness, and become aware of the present of the person you love, in your arms. Hugging mindfully, you should use the breathing. And when you hug someone deeply like that, she will feel it, she will feel nourished by your love, and you'll feel nourished by his love, because the greatest gift you can make to your beloved one is your presence. And that cannot be bought with money.

When you love someone, you have to make yourself available, 'Darling, I am there for you.', that is the deepest love statement. If you don't make yourself available, if you don't make yourself present, how can you love? And that is why the practice of mindfulness is the practice of love, love directed to yourself, love directed to your beloved ones. It's so simple. And that would be achieved in just a few seconds, 'Breathing in, I know I am breathing in, breathing out, I know I am breathing out.', That is the first exercise given by the Buddha to his disciples, and everyone practicing Buddhist meditation begins with this exercise.

You just breathe in and out mindfully a few times, and there you are, firmly grounded in the present moment, ready to touch life, ready to love, ready to make the happiness of the people you love.

The deepest way of touching is the touching with mindfulness. We may touch something with our finger, we can touch something with our eyes, I can touch the sky with my eyes, I can touch a flower with my finger, but without the energy of mindfulness the touching will be shallow, not deep. We need to generate the energy of mindfulness in order for the touching to be deep.

And when the touching is deep, we experience the heart of reality. And that is why the practice is first of all to generate mindfulness, to generate that energy for deep touching and deep looking.

And we always begin by touching the positive, wonderful and refreshing elements within us and around us. These elements have the power to heal, and to transform. We do not begin by touching the negative things, in us and around us, because we need to be nourished, to be healed first. That is why, even if we have pains, distress, afflictions within, if there are pain, distress, afflictions in the world, we should always begin by touching the positive, refreshing, and healing elements first. Touching peace is our practice. Peace is always there, to some extent, in our body, in our feelings, in our consciousness, and we should learn to touch the peace that is already there to get nourished, and to give it a chance to grow.

Peace is there, to some extent, in our environment. We should learn how to touch it in order to get nourished by it, and in order to give it a chance to grow. And only after some time later, when our energy of mindfulness is already strong enough, could we begin to touch war, to touch the war in us, and to touch the war around us, otherwise, touching war will be dangerous. We'll be overwhelmed and destroyed by our own pain, our own afflictions, the pain and afflictions in the world, if we are not strong enough in mindfulness.

When I touch my eyes, deeply with mindfulness, I might realize that my eyes are still in good condition, that it is wonderful to have eyes in good condition. I need only open my eyes in order to see the face, the eyes of my beloved ones. I need only to open my eyes in order to see the blue sky, the white clouds, the luxurious vegetation around me, the sunshine. Without my eyes, I would not be able to do so. So my eyes, thanks to the touching, reveal themselves as a condition of peace, and joy, and well being for me.

I feel nourished by the fact that I have eyes, still, in good condition. And that is touching peace.

There are those of us who have lost our eyesight, and whose wish is how to recover the capacity to see things. They say that if they can recover the possibility of seeing things they will be like going back to paradise. We are practically in paradise, thanks to our eyes. We only need to open our eyes, and use the energy of mindfulness to look, and we see a multitude of miracles, of wonders, around us. And that is a basic condition of our happiness, otherwise we take our eyes for granted, and we don't feel happy. We complain that there's nothing left for us, we only have suffering, inside and outside. That's not true. So touching my eyes with mindfulness, I may get nourished, I may be joyful, and happy.

The same thing is true when I touch my heart, 'Breathing in, I'm aware of my heart, breathing out, I smile to my heart', this is a true meditation. It has the power of healing. It has the power of generating happiness and lovingkindness.

When I touch my heart deeply with mindfulness, I find out my heart still functions normally. What a good news. My heart has been pumping the blood, day and night, for many, many years. My heart has done her best, in order to nourish every cell in our body. My heart has never stopped functioning. My heart is the foundation of my peace, my well being, my joy. So when I touch my heart deeply like that, I become very thankful to my heart. And when I smile to my heart, my smile is the smile of understanding, of lovingkindness. By smiling to my heart I make the vow to live my daily life in such a way that will not give my heart a hard time. I know what to eat, what not to eat, what to drink, what not to drink, in order to be of support to my heart. That is insight. That is

lovingkindness.

That is understanding. The fruit of our practice could be obtained very quickly because of that practice of touching.

You discover very easily that smoking is not a friendly act, directed to your heart. You know it's not nice to your heart, it's not friendly to your heart, to smoke. You don't need anyone to tell you, you just stop smoking. You know that drinking alcohol is not a friendly act to your heart, to your liver. And if you keep touching your heart, deeply with the energy of mindfulness, your insight will be deep, your understanding will be deep. And out of that understanding compassion will arise. You know how to love, how to take care of your heart. You give your heart a chance, because your heart is peace, is well being for you. You don't want to destroy that element of peace and joy and well being in you.

There are so many things within our body that are still playing the role of peace, of well being for us. We have to go back and touch them, with understanding and with compassion, to give them a chance. Because in our daily life, because of our forgetfulness, we continue to do damage to all these things in our body. Everyday we may bring in more elements of war, and conflicts to our body, by the way we eat, and we drink, and walk. Everyday we continue to bring elements of conflicts and war, in the realm of our feelings, and of our perceptions. We are not practicing peace.

The energy of mindfulness helps us to stop bringing war into our body, and feelings, and perceptions. The energy of mindfulness helps us to heal, to love, to take care of the peace that is still available in us, in the realm of the body, the feelings, and perceptions. If we do not practice mindfulness, we have no energy in order to do that, to protect, to heal.

There is a war going on in our body. There is a war going on in our feelings, but when we begin the practice, although we know that the war is there, we try to touch the peace first.

This is the principle of the practice, because touching peace helps us to be nourished, and helps the peace to grow. And meantime, by the practice, the energy of mindfulness will grow. And when we have enough energy of mindfulness, we can begin to touch the other aspect of our being, the aspect of war, afflictions, sorrow, anger, because if you do not have the energy of mindfulness before you touch, the touching will be dangerous. You'll be overwhelmed by what you touch. You may be shattered by what you touch.

Touching peace is a practice. Touching war is a practice, but we should begin by touching peace, inside and outside.

An example for touching peace outside: we know that many trees are dying. We know that many trees are dying, both by the pollution, and by the cutting. But the thing that we should do first is to touch the trees that are still there, healthy, beautiful. We have touch them in order to get nourished, to protect them, to know how precious they are. We should make an alliance with them. We protect them, and protect ourselves. And then when we have profited from their presence, when we have gotten nourished by them, and then we will have more strength in order to do something the dying of the trees.

Touching peace must have a priority. Peace is always there to some extent. Touch it, in order to give it a chance. Touch it inside, touch it outside. And by doing so we generate the energy of mindfulness that will allow us to touch war, with safety. And when we touch war with mindfulness, we transform the war. We touch our anger, our despair, our sorrow, with the energy of mindfulness. And the energy of mindfulness has the power to calm, to soothe, to transform.

It happens often that sometimes we don't need to touch the war, we need only to touch the peace. At the same time we cultivate the energy of mindfulness, and with that mindfulness we can touch the peace, and help the peace to grow, to develop. The peace and the joy, in us and around us, will do the work of transformation for us. There are times when we don't see the need to touch the war, and the war will be transformed.

When you go to a therapist, you and your therapist may have the tendency to touch what is wrong first; 'Tell me your problem.' That's the way people used to begin .

According to this precept, to this practice, we should say,

'Tell me your non-problem', 'Tell me what is not wrong in you'. Because there are many things that do not go wrong, my eyes, my heart, many things that do not go wrong. And we don't touch them, we just want to touch what is wrong, why we are too weak to touch.

All therapists should be able to invite us to go for a walking meditation, enjoying the blue sky, the beautiful trees, touching this piece of joy, of happiness, that has not been touched in the last ten years, by people who live around us. A therapist should be able to touch the joy and the peace in the person of his or her client. And after a few months of practice like that, the client may recover, may restore, the balance in him, her, with no need to touch the so-called problem.

What is not wrong is very important. It is always there to some extent. And if you do not touch them, you continue to destroy them, you destroy the very conditions of peace and well being that are available, now and here. That is why we need a sangha, to help us, to be confident. They have elements of peace and of joy that we can profit from, that we can touch in order to help them grow, in order to protect them.

The teaching of the Avatamsaka is oriented in that direction. You don't have to touch the suffering, the afflictions in you, you just learn the practice, to touch the positive things. When you enter the realm of the Avatamsaka, you practice touching the wonderful things; you touch the light, you touch the flowers, you touch the river, you touch the space that is available in that realm, to get nourished. And slowly, you heal. And since everyone in that realm is practicing the same kind of touching, it becomes so easy for you to do so, and to get healed.

Today we should make some preparations in order for tomorrow, we get into the world of Avatamsaka. And the things we do today, so simple. Practice walking well, breathing well, eating well. Do not lose any moment that is available to us to enjoy the practice of walking. There is the habit energy of running, of course, but we are learning the positive things. We just enjoy walking with other people, enjoying every step we make, as we arrive, because in the here and the now, there are wonderful things to touch.

Be aware that I am with you, every moment. Every time you make a mindful step, and enjoy it, I am there with you, doing it with you. Don't lose any step. Every step is to walk on the here and the now. When you sit, be aware that sitting is a privilege. Sitting there is to be peace, sitting like the Buddha on the cover of a magazine. Sit, in order to be peace, and to inspire your brother and your sister. That is the practice of being peace.

You don't have to do anything, you just sit, and you relax. You enjoy your sitting, your relaxation, your smiling. You enjoy your breathing in and out, 'Breathing in, I know I'm breathing in, breathing out, it's wonderful to breathe out. You know that when you have a stuck nose, it's not pleasant to breathe. When you have asthma, it's not pleasant to breathe. It's wonderful to breathe freely the fresh air here.

So just sit. Don't try to become someone else, be yourself. Enjoy being yourself, sitting there, and breathing. Don't let the projects, any project, any desire to disturb you. You are wonderful like that. You just sit, sitting like a Buddha, sitting with peace, being peace, being joy, and you can enjoy deeply your in breath and your out breath.

By sitting you become peace, and you inspire people around you, you inspire the children, you inspire the nine year old boy. You don't have to do anything, just sit, enjoy your breathing, just enjoy sitting on your cushion. Don't try to become a Buddha. Don't try to become someone else. You are wonderful like that.

When we eat together, eating is our practice. Be there, with your Sangha. Be there one hundred percent. Enjoy your Sangha. It's wonderful to have a Sangha around. And touch the food deeply. A piece of string bean contains the sky, the earth, the whole cosmos. When you pick up a piece of string bean, take one second, or half of one second, to look at it, in order to know that this is a piece of string bean.

When you pick a piece of string bean, just pick string bean, don't pick up anything else, like your idea, your project, your thinking, your fear, your depression. Just pick piece of string bean, look at it, and smile.

It is our practice that if it happens that you are not concentrated, we are not awake, we look at that piece of string bean and call string bean by its name, 'string bean', like you call the name of your beloved one. And you will see that the piece of string bean will reveal herself to you, completely. It is an ambassador of life. It contains the sunshine, it contains the cloud, it contains the earth. It's a wonder, your piece of string bean.

And when you get in touch with the string bean, you get in touch with the whole cosmos. And when you put it in the top of your mouth, put it alone, don't put anything else, your worries, your projects, your anger. Don't put it in your mouth. And when you chew the piece of string bean, you just chew string bean. You touch directly, deeply the piece of string bean. Eat every morsel of your food in that way, touching the food deeply, and touching the community of brothers and sisters deeply. That's the way they ate in the time of the Buddha, everyday, eating in a community, enjoying the presence of the Sangha, enjoying the food. Mindfulness is the practice.

So eating is a deep practice. It can generate joy and peace. And the energy behind, underlying, is the energy of mindfulness. And eating like that will nourish your body, and nourish your joy, your peace. When you drink a glass of water, or tea, drink it in such a way that you are present, and the glass of water, the tea, becomes something very real. Don't drink your idea, your notions, your concepts, your projects, your anger. That is the practice of mindfulness.

Then you know that stepping into the world of Avatamsaka is not difficult at all. Mindfulness is the vehicle by which you can step into the world of the Buddhas and of the bodhisattvas. In that world, people are really present, and they touch things very deeply. And by touching one thing, they touch everything else. It's truly wonderful.

In the Avatamsaka world, everything contains everything else. And when we get into that world, we are able to touch everything at the same time. When you touch a piece of string bean, you touch the whole cosmos, and you touch the nature of inter-being. And today, I will speak a little bit about the nature of interbeing, as a key for us to unlock the reality of the Avatamsaka world.

In all schools of Buddhism, we learn about impermanence, non-self, and we speak about nirvana. Impermanence, is, first of all, an idea, a notion. And you know the meaning of impermanence: nothing remains the same in two consecutive moments, everything is changing all the time. And everything has the nature of impermanence. Things change moment to moment, and at the end of a phase, the change becomes very drastic. We may not see it anymore. We may not conceive it anymore. We may think that it has ceased to be, but in fact, our perception is wrong. Sometimes we term something as 'being', and sometimes else we term it as 'non-being'. All these things belong to the realm of notions, and concepts. And impermanence, here, is an instrument for us to unlock the door of reality, it is not a concept, it is not a doctrine. Impermanence is an instrument, helping us to touch things more deeply.

From the angle of time, we say 'impermanence', but from the angle of space we say 'non-self'. Non-self means there is no separate existence. We have talked about a flower. We have talked about a piece of string bean. Let us talk about the flower, because in the Avatamsaka world there's a lot of flowers. If you look deeply into a flower you'll find out that the flower is impermanent. The flower will die. It is dying now, every moment. And one day, you will see the flower as a piece of garbage. A flower is always on her way to become garbage, that's impermanence.

When we look deeply into a flower, we can see many elements that we can call non-flower elements, like the sunshine. Sunshine is a non-flower element that is crucial for the being of a flower. Without sunshine, no flower can grow. And if we send back element of sunshine, a flower cannot be. So a flower cannot be by itself alone, it has to inter-be with sunshine. Sunshine and flower inter-are.

When we look deeply into a flower, we can see the cloud, without clouds, there will be no rain, and no flower can grow. So when I touch the flower, I touch the cloud. I don't have to fly up into the sky in order to touch the cloud. I touch the cloud when I touch the flower. And when I touch the flower, I touch the compost that has been made of garbage. Garbage is a non-flower element that is very crucial for flower. I can touch the earth, I can touch the minerals, I can touch the farmer, the gardener, I can touch my consciousness, your consciousness in the flower.

So non-self means that a flower does not have any separate existence. A flower is something that can not exist by itself alone. It relies on non-flower elements to be. That is what it means by non-self. Sometimes, we describe the flower as 'empty'. Emptiness, Shunyata, is a very important word, in Buddhism. It means empty, emptiness.

But many people think that to be empty means to be non-existing. That's not true. It will be helpful to ask the question, 'You say that the flower is empty, but empty of what?' And then we say that a flower is full of the cosmos, is full of everything. A flower is full of sunshine, of cloud, of earth, of consciousness, of everything in the cosmos, except one thing. There is one thing lacking in the flower, that is the existence of a separate self. 'Empty of what?', empty of a separate self.

So to say that the flower is empty means that the flower is empty of a separate self, but it means, at the same time, full of everything else in the cosmos. So emptiness here means the fullness. Non-self is equal to emptiness. Non-self is equal to being full of everything. A flower contains the whole cosmos, it is full of the cosmos. It only is empty of a separate existence. It is because of that that

we talk about the nature of emptiness as the nature of interbeing. Nothing can be by itself alone, everything has to inter-be with everything else.

And that is why impermanence and non-self are two instruments given by the Buddha for us to explore reality. And as instruments they should be used, for the practice. If people give you a saw, or a hammer, that is for you to use to do things. If the Buddha offers us the teaching of impermanence and of no-self, that is because he wants us to use impermanence and non-self as instruments to unlock the door of reality, and not to talk about it, not to worship it as a doctrine, as an ideology.

And in our daily life, mindfulness practice helps us to touch everything, deeply, for us to experience the nature of impermanence, of non-self, of emptiness, of interbeing of everything. And if you do that, you find yourself in the world of Avatamsaka, where one thing contains everything else. And if you continue to live like that, you will get rid of your fear, your depression, your afflictions.

There is a way of healing that is very pleasant. In Asia, many traditional doctors tell us that if you know what to eat and what not to eat, then you can heal, any kind of disease. And so many kinds of medicines have been made into wonderful kinds of food.

Go into a Chinese traditional pharmacy, and you will notice so many kinds of roots and leaves and fruits, that are used for healing, that can be transformed into delicious kinds of food. If you have a Chinese friend, a Vietnamese friend, ask them. They'll tell you about how to heal such-and-such a disease, by just enjoying some delicacies. You just enjoy eating the right thing, and then you heal. And by doing so you stop eating the things of the opposite nature.

Here it's very much the same. You don't have to touch the war and afflictions. You just enjoy touching what is healing, what is wonderful and refreshing.

The most wonderful thing in the practice, is by touching deeply what is there, by touching deeply the phenomenal world, you can touch the noumenal world, the world of no birth and no death. And that is exactly the practice in the Avatamsaka Sutra. Touching Nirvana.

Nirvana is the ground of being. Impermanence, non-self, and nirvana are considered to be the basic teaching of Buddhism. In the Northern school it's called the Three Dharma Seals. Every authentic teaching of Buddhism should bear the marks of the Three Seals. Any teaching that betrays, that contradicts the teaching of impermanence, non-self, and nirvana is not Buddhist teaching. They are seals, that prove the authenticity of the Buddhist teaching. First is impermanence, second is non-self, and third is nirvana.

And what is nirvana? Not much has been said about nirvana.

Nirvana means extinction. And it would be very helpful to ask the question, again and again, 'Extinction of what?' It's like 'empty', 'Empty of what?'

Extinction here means, first of all, extinction of concepts, and ideas, even the idea of impermanence, and of non-self. It's truly wonderful. Because impermanence and non-self are given as instruments for you to practice, and not as concepts that you have to cling to. This is very characteristic of Buddhist teaching. It is our concepts, our notions, that serve as the base of our suffering. Our concept of birth, of death, of happiness, of success, of failure, are the very foundation of our unhappiness, and fear.

Suppose you have an idea of happiness. Your idea of happiness may be the obstacle for you to be happy. Suppose you believe that you can only be happy with this condition, this condition, and this condition. Suppose you have got that idea of happiness. You are stuck. These three conditions may never be realized, and you'll be unhappy all your life. There are many ways to be happy. Why confine ourselves to just one way? And that is why to abolish the idea of happiness, you have plenty of chance to be happy.

Your idea of coming and going, birth and death, one and many, being and non-being, are the very obstacles for your happiness, are the very foundation of your fear, your afflictions. We'll find out even more about it later on.

Even the notion, and the concept of impermanence may become an obstacle for your practice. Even the teaching, even the notion of non-self, of emptiness, of interbeing, may become an obstacle for your practice, and enlightenment, and the Buddha is aware of that.

And in the sutra called 'The Better Way to Catch a Snake', the Buddha compared his teaching to a snake. If you are intelligent in receiving and practicing the teaching, the teaching will be wonderful, and will help you to free yourself, to transform. But if you are not skillful, and if you receive wrongly the teaching, and practice wrongly the teaching, you get more harm than good. It's like when you don't know how to catch a snake, you catch the snake by the tail, it will turn around and bite you. You should learn how to use a fork, in order to pin the neck of the snake down, and then you take the snake by the head. Even though if the snake roll around your arm, it cannot do you any harm. That is a very important sutra, and I urge you to learn it.

The Buddha in that sutra said that his teaching is like a raft, to transport you to the other shore, the shore of emancipation, the shore of the end of suffering. Do not mistake the raft as the shore. Do not put the raft on your head to go. You have to use the raft with intelligence.

That is why we should learn how to receive the teaching of impermanence and non-self as instruments for our practice, so that we can touch the true nature of reality. And if we succeed, we will touch nirvana.

Nirvana is, first of all, the extinction of all ideas and concepts. And, of course,

when you are free from notions and concepts, you'll be free from the sufferings. The extinction of ideas, concepts, the extinction of all afflictions, that's nirvana. But touching nirvana is something you can do, right now, right here, in this retreat.

In the gatha that we learned last night, 'I have arrived, I am home, in the here, in the now, I feel solid, I feel free, in the ultimate, I dwell', it is the practice of touching nirvana, because nirvana has the nature of solidity and freedom, and non-fear. Every time you practice, and get more solid, freer, you touch more nirvana.

The image offered here is the image of a wave. A wave may think of itself as having a beginning, an end. A wave may think of herself as being high, or being low, being more beautiful than the other waves, or being less beautiful than the other waves. A wave may have a complex of inferiority.

A wave may have low self-esteem.

But the practice is for the wave to realize and to touch the water within her. On the side of the water, all the epithets that have been used for waves cannot be applied; a beginning, an end; high, low; more beautiful, less beautiful- all these terms, all these epithets cannot be attributed to water. And if a wave is capable of touching the water, all the fear, all the complex, all the afflictions will be ended, very soon.

In the Lotus Sutra, we used to describe the wave as being in the historical dimension, and describe water as being in the ultimate dimension. If the wave can live the life of a wave, at the same time as the life of water, that will be perfect. When you touch deeply the historical dimension, you touch the ultimate dimension, and when you have touched the ultimate dimension, you have not left the historical dimension.

Look at the Three Seals. I draw a line to separate nirvana and the world of impermanence and non-self. Nirvana is the water. Impermanence and non-self are the waves. Our practice is to touch the wave, the phenomenal world, to touch

very deeply. And when we touch deeply, the wave, the phenomenal world, we touch the nature of inter-being, the emptiness, and we touch nirvana. And if we are capable of touching nirvana, our fear, our afflictions will be vanished.

Let me offer you an example, for you to see that touching nirvana is something you can do also, to some extent. And if you continue, you can do it deeply.

Suppose yesterday you met someone. The meeting was difficult. He said something that hurt you deeply, but he did not give you a chance to answer. You were deeply hurt. You did not have a chance to tell him your feeling. And after he was gone, you were angry, you felt that your dignity was lost. You thought that if he had given you three minutes you'll be able to tell him something, to show that you are not that bad, that weak. And because of the fact that you were hurt deeply, you suffer so much, and you could not manage to enjoy your dinner.

But in the evening, a very good friend came to visit, and you were able to touch the presence of that good friend. You were able to forget about your suffering. And then when your friend left, you managed to sleep well, happily. In the morning, you forget everything. This morning, you wake up, and you forget everything. You forget the fact that you were very hurt yesterday. You suffer a lot yesterday, you could not eat your dinner. You forgot everything. And while you are brushing your teeth, suddenly you remember what happened yesterday, and you burst out laughing, and laughing. You laugh because you don't understand why yesterday you suffered that much. Now, as you see it, it's not important at all.

We all have had that kind of experience. We thought that if we could not answer that person, we could not retort, reply, we would die. But in fact, waking up this morning, we don't feel any need to reply to him. It's not so important anymore. That's what you see now, this morning. And only one night separates you from the event, and yet your view of the world, your attitude, so different already.

If you are able to touch the situation more globally, if you are capable of touching infinite time and space, small situations will never be able to catch you. You will never be caught in small situations and suffer that much.

In the West, you have begun to day, 'think globally', 'see globally', it is in the direction of touching nirvana. If you stand on the soil of France, and if you are only a Frenchman, you may suffer more than if you are standing on the soil of France but you see that you are touching the soil of Europe. A lot of afflictions will be removed already. Even if you are standing right in the same place, but if you can stand on that place as a European, you suffer much less already. And if you are capable of standing on the planet, thinking of yourself as a citizen of the planet, you will suffer much less. And that is why when we learn to touch things globally, we will no longer be caught in small situations. And our freedom, our joy will be greater.

Now suppose you just have a dispute with your beloved one. She is the person you love the most in this world. And it is because of that, you get very hurt, because of what she just said. If someone else said that I would not be very hurt, but because my beloved one has said that, I get very hurt. And I suffer so much that I don't want to see her, to look at her anymore. The practice given, is, you close your eyes, you take one in-breath and now one out-breath, deep, and you visualize you and your beloved one, one hundred years from now. And after that you open you eyes. I am sure that you will come and hug her deeply, deeply, and you will stop suffering.

That is the kind of practice oriented toward the touching of nirvana. And it is effective, right away. If we care to practice, if we care to train ourself, and then touching nirvana is not difficult. It is a daily thing we can do.

Does a wave have to do a lot in order to become water? No. A wave doesn't have to become water, because it is water already. Nirvana is not something we have to run after, to catch. We have been nirvanized for a long time already. We are nirvana ourselves. That is why in the tradition of Buddhism, there are so many schools that offer the teaching on the phenomenal world, like the teaching of the

abhidharma, the teaching of vijñānavāda. These kind of teachings are termed teachings on the svalakṣaṇa. 'Lakṣaṇa' means the marks, the appearance, the phenomenal aspect of reality.

There are other schools of Buddhism offering the teaching on the noumenal aspect of reality, like the Prajñāpāramitā school, the school of Śūn Lun, the Three Treaties on emptiness. But we should remember always, when you touch the historical dimension deeply, you touch the ultimate dimension, and when you have touched the ultimate dimension, you have not left the historical dimension.

Touching the wave is to touch the water. Touching the water is to touch the wave. A wave does not have to stop being a wave in order to be water. And that is what we mean by 'in the ultimate, I dwell'. Breathing in, the wave bows itself down and becomes water, breathing out, the wave has become water, fearless, and free from all afflictions.

Avatamsaka is the name of a Buddhist sutra. It's a very wonderful sutra. I'll talk to you about it tomorrow. Today let us enjoy walking together, touching deeply the historical dimension, enjoying every breath you take, enjoying every step you make, enjoying the sangha around you. And after that we come together for a community lunch. Enjoy being together, having lunch together.

Where shall we gather in order to begin walking meditation?

We will gather in front of this meditation hall, and we begin walking in ten minutes. Enjoy massaging your feet.

From Thursday morning, October 19th, 1993

Dear friends, yesterday I spoke about mindfulness and the energy that helps us to be present, in the here and the now, so that we may be able to touch life deeply, each moment. When we are there, it becomes possible to recognize the presence of the other, the other person, the other event.

Suppose the other is the full moon. If we are not there, how can we recognize the presence of the full moon? The full moon is a wonder, of life, that can be touched in the present moment. The full moon is available to us only when we are really there. That is why our true presence brings about a true presence of the other. The other may be the full moon, the blue sky, or the beautiful sunset. If we are not there, all these things are not for us.

The other may be your beloved ones. Now you share your life with the person you love, the person you love. You are able to see his face in the morning. You are able to see her face in the afternoon, or in the evening. You have the opportunity to contemplate his face in the morning, and to contemplate her face in the afternoon. But if we are not there, if we are absent, how can that be possible? If we are caught into so many things, if we lose ourself in the past or in the future, in our anger, in our anxiety, how could we be able to look and recognize the face of the person we love? And that is why it is so important to be there. The practice is to be there.

The energy of mindfulness helps you to be there, and when you are there, you'll be able to recognize, to acknowledge the presence of the person you love. 'Darling, I know you are there', that is true love.

If we are not capable of looking at each other, deeply, in the present moment, everything will become a dream tomorrow. That is why standing before a

beautiful tree, looking at a beautiful moon, looking at the person you love, you have to be mindful, you have to be there in order for the touching to be true, to be deep, to be possible.

The first miracle of mindfulness is for us to be there, is to make us to be there, to help us to be there. The second miracle performed by mindfulness is to recognize the presence of the other, your beloved one, the beautiful moon, the beautiful tree, the cherry tree in blossom.

The third function of mindfulness is to relieve the suffering of the other person, 'Darling, I know you suffer, that is why I'm there for you.' Before you can do anything, your presence already helps a lot. So bring your presence to offer to the person you love. And your presence will be able to relieve a lot of suffering from that person.

If that person doesn't have your attention, if you are always absent, she will continue to die, slowly, slowly. Without attention, without love, no one can continue to live. And with your presence, with your attention, the suffering in that person will be relieved.

And if you continue to touch that person, you'll be able to understand the roots of the afflictions, of the pain in him, or in her. And the moment when you understand, you identify the roots of suffering in him or her, you'll be able to help him or her to transform.

We continue to suffer because we don't know, we don't see, we have not seen the true nature of our suffering. The moment when we identify the causes of our suffering, the moment when we see into the roots of our suffering, we are already on the path of liberation.

The Buddha has said this, 'What has come to be, if you look deeply into its heart, you'll be able to identify the kind of nutriment that has brought it in, and having

that insight, you are already on the path of emancipation, of liberation.' And that is the fourth function of mindfulness, looking deeply. Looking deeply helps you to see, to understand, to have the insight of what is wrong. And the insight has the power to liberate, to transform you.

These miracles can be performed if you have the energy of mindfulness. And therefore, in our daily life, we live in such a way that we can cultivate, and generate the energy of mindfulness.

With mindfulness, the first miracle is to produce your own presence, your true presence. The second miracle is to recognize the presence of the other. The third is to relieve the suffering of the other person, or of yourself, because mindfulness has the capacity of calming, and relieving.

When the baby cries, the mother picks it up, and holds it in her arms. The mother has not found out the reason why the baby cries, but because the mother is made of tenderness, care, and love, and that is why while holding the baby, the energy of tenderness, care and love begins to penetrate into the baby. The baby gets a relief already, before the mother does anything.

And if the mother continues to be mindful, to be caring, the mother will find out the reason why the baby cries. Maybe the baby is cold, maybe the baby has a fever, maybe the baby is hungry. She finds out very soon because she is mindful. She continues to look at the baby, deeply, while holding the baby in her arms.

Mindfulness plays a role that is exactly alike. First of all, it brings about the presence. Secondly, it recognizes the presence of the other, in this case the baby. The third is, it calms, it relieves some of the suffering. The fourth is the continued looking, the practice of deep looking, in order to discover what is wrong.

And meditation is described as calming, and deep looking. Calming, relieving, is

samatha, and deep looking is vipashyana. These are two aspects of the practice. And the energy behind, to do the work, is mindfulness. Mindfulness does the work of calming, relieving the suffering, mindfulness does the work of deep looking, in order to bring about the insight. And the insight is something that has the power to liberate, to transform. And that is why organize our life in such a way, organize our daily life in such a way that we can generate the energy of mindfulness, every moment of our life. Walking, we walk mindfully; drinking our tea, we drink mindfully; cleaning the house, we clean mindfully; driving the car, we drive mindfully.

Mindfulness can be practiced anywhere, and at any time. You don't need to sit all day in the meditation hall in order to practice. Bring the practice out, to the marketplace, to the front yard, to the city. And help other people to touch mindfulness, and to live mindfully also.

In a retreat, the best thing you can offer, to yourself, is mindfulness. You walk mindfully. You share your lunch, mindfully. You sit mindfully, you breathe mindfully. And that is also the biggest, the most precious gift that you can make to the people around you, the brothers and the sisters in the Dharma that are practicing with you. You don't have to do anything in order to make him or her happy, just be mindful, that is the most positive thing you can offer to the person next to you, to the brothers and the sisters in the Dharma that are practicing with you.

If I met someone on my path, walking in the opposite direction, I should not worry about how to greet him, or her, how to be nice to him or her, because I know that the best thing the best thing I can offer the person who is walking in my direction, is to walk beautifully, touching the earth deeply, relaxing, smiling. And the sight of my walking, and breathing, and smiling, is the best thing I can offer to that brother, or that sister who is coming to my direction.

And then, by touching deeply, I know that brother or that sister is myself. It's not someone that I have to confront. I should not worry about how to face him or her, or how to be nice to him, or to her. Maybe we have an idea that that person

may think we are distant, we are cold, so we worry a little bit. We should not do so. We should not think like that, because we know that the best thing we can offer him or her is our mindfulness, our joy. So be joyful, and be mindful, and that is the greatest gift you can offer to him or to her.

And when you come close, and if your eyes meet, continue to practice. You don't have to confront- breathe in, 'Breathing in, I calm myself, breathing out, I smile'. You do it. And if you have full mindfulness in you, that's the best thing you can do. And we communicate with each other with our mindfulness, not with anything else. We should not worry about whether I am warm enough, to him or to her, I am sympathetic enough to him or to her, just be mindful, and that is already the best.