

Mitchell Radnor shared about the transcript of Thay dharma talk on Aug 22, 2001
Which talked about all aspects of Order of Interbeing memberships.

Teaching for Order of Interbeing Members By The Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh

Three sounds of the bell

Today is 22 August 2001 in Deer Park Monastery.

There is a sutra with the title Yasoja – that’s the name of a monk, the Sangha leader. This sutra, Udanakarmad is found in the collection called Udana, Inspired Sayings.

Yasoja was a Sangha leader of a community of monks, about 500. One day he led the 500 monks to the place where the Buddha lived, hoping that they could join the three-month retreat with the Buddha. It was about ten days before the retreat began and they arrived very joyfully, thinking that they would see the Buddha and the other monks. There were lots of greetings, lots of talking and from his hut the Buddha heard the loud noise. He asked Ananda, “What is that noise? It sounds like fishermen landing a catch of fish.” Ananda said that the Venerable Yasoja had come with 500 monks and they were greeting and talking with the resident monks, which was why there was such a great noise.

The Buddha said: “Ask them to come to me.” And when the monks came they touched the earth in front of the Buddha and they sat down. The Buddha said: “You are to go away. You cannot stay with me: you are too noisy. I dismiss you.”

So the 500 monks touched the earth, went around the Buddha and left the monastery of Jeta Park. They went to the kingdom of Vajji, on the east side of Koshala, and it took them many days to reach this territory. When they arrived on the bank of the river Vaggamuda they sat down and then they began to build small huts for their rain retreat. During the ceremony of starting the retreat the Venerable Yasoja said: “The Buddha sent us away out of compassion. You should know that He is expecting us to practice deeply and successfully. That is why he sent us away. It was an expression of his deep love.”

All the monks were able to see that and they agreed that they should practice very seriously during the rain retreat to show the Buddha that they were worthy to be His disciples. So they dwelled quietly and practiced very deeply, very ardently, very solidly. After only three months’ retreat the majority of the monks had realized the three enlightenments, the three kinds of achievement. One is about remembering all past lives. The second is to see the lives of human beings as other beings – how they have come and after a time they go – and to see this very clearly. The third realization is achieved when basic afflictions within the practitioner have ended: no more cravings, anger and ignorance.

One day after the rain retreat the Buddha told Ananda: “When I look towards the east I notice that there is some good energy – the energy of light and goodness – and when I use my concentration I see that the 500 monks that were sent away by me have achieved something very deep.” Ananda said: “That is true Lord, for I have already heard about them. After being dismissed they settled down in the Rajghir territory and began serious practice. Now they have all realized the three realizations” So the Buddha said: “That’s good. Why don’t we invite them to come over for a visit?”

The 500 monks, when they heard the invitation of the Buddha, were very glad to come and visit

Him. After many days of traveling they arrived at about seven o'clock in the evening and found the Buddha sitting quietly. They found out that the Buddha was in a state of concentration called imperturbability. In this state you are not perturbed by anything – you are very free and very solid. Nothing can shake you, including fame, craving, hatred or even hope. When the monks realized that the Buddha was in the state called imperturbability they said: “The Lord is sitting in that state so why don't we sit like him?” So they all sat down like the Lord, in the Jeta Park, very beautifully, very deeply, very solidly. All of them entered into the state of imperturbability and sat like the Buddha. They sat for a long time. When the night was very advanced and the first watch was finished, the Venerable Ananda came to the Lord and knelt down and said: “Lord, it is already very late in the night. Why don't you address the monks?”

The Lord did not say anything and they all continued to sit. The second watch of the night had gone by and it was about two or three o'clock in the morning. Again Ananda came, knelt down and said: “The night is very far gone. It is now the end of the second watch. Please address the 500 monks.” But the Buddha kept silent and continued to sit. All the monks continued to sit also.

Finally the third watch of the night passed and the sun began to appear on the horizon. Ananda came for the third time and he knelt in front of the Buddha and said: “Great Teacher, now the night is over why don't you address the monks?” The Buddha opened his eyes, looked at Ananda and said: “Ananda, you did not know what was going on. That is why you have come and asked me three times. This is what was going on: I was sitting in a state of imperturbability and all the monks sat in that state of being, not disturbed by anything at all. That is the best situation we can have. We don't need anything else. We don't need any communication. We don't need any greetings. We don't need any talk. It is the most beautiful thing that can happen between teacher and student. We just sat like that, each of us dwelling in a state of peace and solidity and freedom.”

I find that sutra very, very beautiful. The communication between teacher and disciple is perfect. What a student should expect from a teacher is nothing less than the freedom of the teacher. The teacher should be free from craving, free from fear, free from despair. When you come to the temple you should not expect small things like having a cup of tea with the teacher or having him say that you are a good person who has many merits and so on. These things are nothing at all. You should expect from a teacher much more than that. If your teacher has enough freedom, enough peace and enough insight, then that will satisfy you entirely. If he does not have any solidity, any freedom, then he should not be your teacher and you should not accept him or her as your teacher because you'll get nothing out of him.

As a Dharma teacher or a big brother or sister in the Dharma what do you expect from your students? Again, you should not expect small things. You should not expect him or her to bring you a cup of tea, a good meal, a cake or some words of praise. They are nothing at all. You should expect from your student their transformation, their healing and their freedom.

When teacher and students are like that they are in a perfect state of communication. They don't have to say anything to each other. They don't have to do much. They just sit with each other like that, in a state of solidity, imperturbability and that is the most beautiful aspect of a teacher-student relationship.

I have found this sutra very, very beautiful.

A long pause

When a student practices well he can see the teacher in himself, in herself. Likewise when a teacher practices well he can see himself in the student. They should not expect less than that. If you always see the teacher as someone outside of yourself, you have not profited much from your teacher. You have to see that your teacher is in you, in every moment. If you fail to see that, your practice has not gone well at all. So too, if as a teacher you look at your students and do not see yourself in those students, your teaching has not gone very far.

When I look into the person of a disciple, whether she is a monastic or a lay person, I would like to see that my teaching has only one aim – to transmit my insight, my freedom and my joy to my disciples. If I look at her and I see these elements in her eyes, I am very glad. I feel that I have done well in transmitting the best that is in me. Looking at a student disciple's way of walking, of smiling, of greeting and of being, I can see whether my teaching has been fruitful or not. That is what is called "transmission".

Transmission isn't organized by a ceremony with a lot of incense and chanting. Transmission happens every day in a very simple way. If the teacher/student relationship is good, then that transmission is realized in every moment of our daily life. You don't feel far away from your teacher. You feel that he is, she is, always with you because the teacher outside has become the teacher inside. You know how to look with the eyes of your teacher. You know how to walk with the feet of your teacher. Your teacher is never apart from you. This is not something abstract: it is something that we can see for ourselves. If you look at a monk or a nun or a lay disciple and you see Thay in him, you know that he is a full disciple of Thay. But if you don't see that, you may be a newly-arrived person who does not have any Thay within himself and is filled with curiosity.

When we look into ourselves, we can see it also – we can see whether our way of walking or smiling or thinking has that element of freedom, of joy, of compassion – and then we know that Thay has been taken into ourselves as a true continuation of our teacher. You don't need another person to tell you: you can know it by yourself. And when you look at the other fellow you see it by yourself also. If the teacher/student relationship is good, then the transmission is taking place in every moment of daily life.

Every time we take a step we know, by ourselves, whether that step contains peace, joy, solidity or not. You don't need your teacher to tell you. You know whether your step is a real step, containing solidity and freedom, or not. If your step does not have freedom, you know it doesn't. If your step doesn't have the element of solidity, you know it doesn't. It's not hard: it's so obvious.

Your step is like a cup which can be empty and some juice or tea can be poured into it. If there is something in the cup, it is obvious. When there is tea in the cup, you can drink and enjoy it. First I make a step here, a step here, a step here (Thay takes a few steps as he talks). My practice is to fill each step with the element of solidity and peace. For I know very well that every step like that is highly nourishing and healing. When I make a step I say: "I have arrived" or "I am home". So there is the element of arrival here and you know whether you have arrived or not. You don't know how to enjoy every step you make because you've been running all your life. Now you have become a student of the Buddha, you want to make real steps and every step should be full of the element of arrival, full of the element of here and now, full of the element of stability, solidity and freedom.

In the time of the Buddha there were no airplanes, there were no buses, there were no cars. And

the Sangha just walked from one country to another country. They spent time in many countries and yet they only walked. They had their way of walking and they were able to enjoy every step they made. The Buddha was a monk and his disciples were monks. They walked together like this from one place to another as traveling monks, stopping only for the three months' rain. So they had plenty of time to practice walking meditation and wherever they went they inspired people because of their way of walking and sitting. You can arrive fully when you are sitting and when you are walking. You are not in a hurry, you are not looking for something else outside yourself. You know that everything you are looking for is in the here and now and that is why every step you make helps you to arrive in the here and now. That is why the teaching and the practice of arrival is so wonderful, so marvelous.

Our society is characterized by running. Everyone is running, running to the future. You want to assure a good future and since you see other people around you running, you cannot resist running. If you do not have peace you are not capable of being in the here and the now and touching life very deeply. Running like that, you hope to arrive. But running like that has become a habit and you are not able to arrive any more. Your whole life is for running.

In this teaching, in this practice, the point of arrival is not over there. The point of arrival is here in every minute, in every second. Life is a kind of walk: it can be found here, here, here, here and here, in every step. We continue like this (Thay walks slowly). So life can be found in a step and in the space between steps. If we expect to see life outside of these steps and the space between steps, we don't have life. It is very clear, yet the great majority is running. That is why the practice of arrival is so important. It's a drastic kind of medicine for healing our society because you carry, in each of you, the whole of society. The whole of society is running, and therefore we are running. So awakening can bring the desire to resist, to stop.

The teaching of the three doors of liberation is crucial: the door of emptiness, the door of signlessness and the door of aimlessness. Aimlessness means that you are not running any more. You are not running after anything at all because what you want to become you already are. What you are searching for is already there in the here and the now. Your peace, your happiness, your solidity, your freedom is available in every step. Aimlessness is your chance to stop. You should not run any more. If you think of gaining peace and freedom, peace and freedom are right here, right now. The belief that peace and freedom is in the other direction is an error. That is why every step you take should bring you to the place where freedom and solidity exist. Freedom and solidity are the ground for true happiness: without solidity, no happiness is possible; without freedom no happiness is possible. Every step can generate stability and solidity. Every step can generate the energy of freedom. If you are walking correctly, then the energy freedom and solidity can be generated in every step and happiness is there, in every step. Another person looking at you walking is able to see whether your steps have the element of solidity and freedom. The Buddha need not tell you. You don't need her or him to tell you. You yourself know very well whether the step you take has, or has not, the element of solidity. You are walking but you have already arrived, with every step, and walking like that is your daily practice. Arrival is achieved in every step. It would be very nice to send Thay a postcard to say: "Thay, I have arrived." It is the thing that will make him happy. "I have arrived; I don't run any more."

The habit of running has become very strong. It is a collective habit, a collective energy. Mentally you find it normal to run but it is not normal because if you continue to run like that,

happiness will not be possible, peace will not be peace. This contributes to the collective suffering and the individual suffering. So it is very important to learn how to stop.

The Buddha and his monks did not have a lot to consume. They did not have a bank account. They did not own big buildings and houses. Each monk was supposed to have only three robes, one begging bowl and one water filter. They traveled around with only these things. The monks and nuns of our time try their best to follow this example.

If you want to become a monk or a nun you should not have a personal bank account. No one at Deer Park has a bank account. No one has a personal car. Even the robes we wear do not belong to us: they belong to the Sangha. If you need a robe, the Sangha will provide you with one but then it still remains a robe of the Sangha. Even your body is not your personal property, it does not belong to you. You have to take care of your body because it is part of the Sangha body.

Other monks and nuns have to help take care of your body and you have to allow them to take care of you. They can intervene in the way you eat and drink because your body belongs to the whole Sangha – the Sanghakaya. You don't own anything at all, including your body, and yet happiness is possible, freedom is possible. Happiness is easier if you don't own many things.

Usually if you don't own anything you are fearful, you are very afraid, you don't feel secure. But the practice of a monastic is the opposite: what guarantees your well-being is not possessions but the giving away of all possessions.

I remember when Sister Thuc Nghiem, Sister Susan and many other sisters like Emilie became nuns. They took everything from their pockets and they gave it to Thay: 25 cents, the key of their car. To become a nun or a monk you should give up everything: you should not have an apartment or a car or anything. You have to donate everything before you can be accepted as an ordained novice and you are asked not to donate it to the temple where you are to become a monk or a nun but to some other organization. One day Thay gave an exercise for all the monks and nuns: "Tell me of your daily happiness. Use a sheet of paper and a pencil and write about your daily happiness." Many of them built up more than two pages. I remember that one of the things that Sister Susan wrote down was: "My happiness is that I don't have any money any more." That is true. Before she became a nun she handed over a very large sum of money but she had not had peace. She did not have happiness. She gave away all these things to become a nun and she gained a lot of liberty, a lot of freedom, and that is the foundation of happiness which is why she wrote "My happiness is that I do not have any money any more." She really felt this happiness.

Three sounds of the bell

Many people believe that practicing as a monk is the hardest path ... but that is not the case. It is easy to practice as a monk or a nun. First you have entrusted yourself entirely to the Sangha. You don't have to worry about anything at all – food, shelter, medicine or transportation. Also, everyone around you is practicing – practicing walking mindfully, enjoying every step. It would be strange if you didn't do the same. So mentally you are transported by the boat of the Sangha and even if you don't want to go in the direction of peace and freedom, you go anyway! You have left behind your family – your father, your mother, your friends, your job – in order to become a monk or a nun and your purpose is to gain freedom because you know that true happiness is not really possible without freedom. You aspire deeply to freedom and freedom here means freedom from afflictions.

Of course political freedom is enjoyable but if you not free from your afflictions then political freedom is not worth anything to you. Say you are a refugee who cannot go anywhere you want and it is your deepest desire to have an identity card or passport. You may wait ten, twenty, thirty years and still you don't get that passport to become free, to go anywhere you want. There are other people who have that passport, that piece of paper, but who don't feel any happiness and some of these people even commit suicide. Political freedom is enjoyable but if you not free from your afflictions – namely craving, despair, jealousy – suffering will still be there within and around you. That is why the purpose of the practice is to get free ... to get free in order for the Kingdom of God to be available to you in the here and now. Get free in order for true life to be possible for you in the here and now ... for the pure land of the Buddha to be available to you in the here and now.

Sometimes the pure land of the Buddha and all its marvels seem to be very close. In fact everything in us and around us is a miracle: your eye is a miracle; your heart is a miracle; your body is a miracle; the orange you are eating is a miracle; and the cloud floating in the sky is a miracle. If they do not belong to the Kingdom of God then to what do they belong? From time to time we have the clear impression that the Kingdom is here, is available in our daily life. But since we are running all the time, we do not have the freedom to enjoy it – it is not available to us.

I would say that the Kingdom of God is available to you but you are not available to the Kingdom of God. That is why we need to learn to live, to walk, in such a way that we become a free person. That is the meaning of all the practice.

To practice is not to become a Dharma teacher: a Dharma teacher is nothing at all. It does not mean to become a Sangha leader: to be a Sangha leader does not mean anything at all. What is the use of being the head of the big temple if you continue to suffer deeply? The purpose of practice is to become free and with your freedom, happiness is possible. With your freedom and happiness, you can help so many people for you have something to share, to offer to them. You don't share your ideas; you don't share what you have accumulated from your Buddhist studies. Even professors of Buddhism may suffer very deeply because Buddhist ideas have not helped them at all. What you need is freedom and, whereas Buddhist studies may be helpful, our happiness is the accumulation of peace, including what we study and the authority we are given in the Sangha and in society. Many people in our society are not truly happy and many of them commit suicide. Our way should be different: it is the way of freedom.

Is it possible to be free? Looking into the person of a practitioner, whether a Dharma brother, a Dharma sister or your teacher, you can see how much freedom he has, how much freedom and happiness she has. We would like to have true Dharma brothers and sisters because sitting close to them, living close to them, we profit from their happiness and freedom because their happiness is based on their freedom and not on anything else, like change, authority, power.

What we profit from in a Sangha is the opportunity to do what the other people are doing, namely sitting, walking, smiling, greeting – all of these aimed at gaining freedom, at stopping.

What is the meaning of wearing a brown jacket? It's not to declare that I am an ordained member of the Order. That's nothing. It's like the value of a student identity card: you got into a famous university and you were given a student identity card but if you don't study, what is the use of having the identity card? Having the ID is about making use of the library, sitting in the classroom and having professors and the means to study. So, when you are ordained, you receive

the fourteen mindfulness trainings and get the jacket. These are identity cards which allow us to profit from the Sangha, from the teaching, from the practice.

There are Dharma centers, there are monasteries, there are teachers, there are Dharma brothers and sisters who practice and being a member of the Order of Interbeing helps us to profit from all of these in order to advance on our path of freedom. With enough freedom we can make others around us happy. We know that practicing without a Sangha is difficult so we try our best to set up a Sangha around us, where we live. To be an OI member is wonderful. To be a Dharma teacher is wonderful. Wonderful, not because we have the title of OI membership, or of Dharma teacher, but because we have the chance to practice and to organize.

As an OI member you have to organize the practice. Wherever you are it is your duty to set up a group of people to practice, otherwise it does not mean anything to be an OI member. An OI member is expected to organize the practice in his or her area – for five people, six people, ten people, twenty people – and to practice very reliably, at a local level and sometimes at a national level. You have to take care of the Sangha and support the Sangha because the Sangha is what supports you in your practice. So building the Sangha means building yourself. If the Sangha is there, you practice with the Sangha so as a Sangha-builder you enjoy the benefit, the opportunity to practice

Being a Dharma teacher is also an opportunity to practice – you cannot not practice! You need to practice in order that your teaching has content. How can you open your mouth and give the teaching if you don't do it yourself? The teaching is an opportunity: even if you are not an excellent teacher yet, being a Dharma teacher helps very much when you speak about the Dharma, for you have to do what you are sharing, otherwise it looks odd. It's like a monk living with other monks: when everyone is doing walking meditation it would look strange if that monk did not do the practice. So, as a Dharma teacher, you have a great opportunity to practice. Every member of the Sangha can create favorable conditions for you, whether that member is good at the practice or not. A person who has a strong practice may inspire you to be at least like him or her and another person who is very weak in the practice may draw you to help them. So being a Dharma teacher is a good thing.

It would be strange if you got the transmission and you got a jacket and you didn't build the Sangha to practice with. It would be exactly like getting a student ID and never going to the library or the classes, saying: "You know I am a student of that famous university." So Sangha building is what we do and Sangha building is our practice. Sangha building means to identify elements of the Sangha and to invite and help each element of the Sangha to join the practice. You are like a gardener: you take care of, you help the growth of, every member of the Sangha. There will be members who are very easy to be with and to deal with and there will be members who are difficult to be with and to deal with but as a Sangha builder you have to help everyone. There will be members of the Sangha whose presence you can enjoy deeply. There will be other members of the Sangha with whom you have to be very patient.

Please don't believe that every monastic or lay person in Plum Village is equally easy for Thay! That's not the case. There are monastics that are very easy to be with and to help and there are monastics who are so difficult. But a teacher has to spend more time and energy with those who are difficult. You may find you get angry and you want to say "no" to these difficult elements. But that is to surrender. You cannot grow into a good Dharma teacher if you want only the easy things. In a Sangha there must be difficult people and that is normal. The difficult people are a

good thing for you for they will test your capacity for Sangha building and practicing. One day you will be able to smile and you won't suffer at all when that person says something unpleasant to you. Your compassion will have been born and you will be capable of embracing him or her within your compassion and your understanding. Then you will know that your practice has grown and you should feel delighted to be able to see that such a sentence, such an act, no longer makes you angry because you have developed enough compassion and understanding. So that is why we must not be tempted to eliminate the element whom we think to be difficult in the Sangha.

Sangha building needs a lot of love and compassion. If you know how to handle difficult moments, you will grow as a Sangha builder and you will grow as a Dharma teacher. Thay, speaking to you out of his own experience, can say that he has developed a lot more patience and compassion and that his happiness is very much greater because he has more patience and compassion. You should believe Thay in these respects. We suffer because our understanding and compassion are not great enough to embrace the difficult people. But with the practice, your heart will grow, your understanding and compassion will grow and you will not suffer any more. You will have a lot of space and you will give others a lot of time and space in order to transform. Thanks to the Sangha practicing, thanks to your model of practice, those you found difficult will transform. That is a great success, much greater than with pleasant people. Love is not only enjoyment – we enjoy the presence of pleasant people. Love is a practice of generating more compassion and understanding. You must always remember that love is not just a matter of enjoyment. Love is a practice. And it is that aspect of love that can bring you growth and happiness – the greatest happiness.

There is no way to happiness; happiness is the way. Happiness should be found in every moment of your daily life and not at the end of the road. The end of the road is the stopping because life is now, in every second, in every moment. Peace is every step; happiness is every step. It is so clear; it's so plain; it's so simple.

Suppose I draw a circle representing my root Sangha where I was ordained in the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings, where I had a teacher and many Dharma brothers and sisters. I was born of that place. The root Sangha is my spiritual birthplace and every time I think of it I should feel joy, pure joy and hope. Every time I think of it I feel inspired; I feel happiness. All of us should have such a place which we carry around within us, everywhere we go. That place is situated not just in space: it is internal within us. Those of us who do not carry such a place in our hearts do not have enough happiness. It is a pleasure to go back to the root Sangha and to be there.

Because I have my function, my role in society, I am here. I am here but I hold my root Sangha within my heart, as a source of inspiration, a source of energy for me.

Around me I have built a local Sangha. I am aware that, although it is my local Sangha, it will be the root Sangha of many other people. Whether it is in Chicago, in Buffalo or somewhere else, my local Sangha will become the root Sangha for friends who come here to learn the practice. So the root Sangha is not out there: it is here in me. The seat of my root Sangha in me will help make this local Sangha into a root Sangha for others. I am a member of the OI. I have to make it into a home for those of my friends who constitute my Sangha here and my Sangha here reflects the image of my root Sangha there.

In my Sangha people know how to enjoy every step, every breath. They know how to take care

of each other. They know that the purpose of the practice is to get freedom and nothing else. I build my Sangha out of love, out of my deepest desire. That is the path I undertake, the path of freedom, and I devote my time, my energy, into building the Sangha whereby the root becomes a reality. If brotherhood is not there happiness cannot be possible. The mark of an authentic Sangha is the brotherhood. Those who come to the Sangha do so not to become proficient in the Sangha but because they want to have brothers and sisters in the practice of freedom. If the practice is correct, then the brotherhood should be built and should be strong. It is that brotherhood which sustains us, to help us stand firm in our practice.

We know that a little further away there is another local Sangha and there is another OI member who is doing just what we are doing here. So, weekly, we practice with our local Sangha. We organize local events – days of mindfulness, short retreats, Dharma discussion, tea meditation, walking meditation – all at a local level. From time to time we invite other Sanghas to join us to make it into a regional activity.

So we have the local and then the regional level. And of course we combine our talents and experience with other OI members, with other Sangha-builders, to make the regional events. Everyone can contribute and everyone can learn a lot from activities on the regional level. Then from time to time we organize, together with our root Sangha, national activities on a national level. You might use places like Deer Park, the Green Mountain Dharma Center or Plum Village for your national activity. Finally there will be activities on an international level. Then we might meet with practitioners from Sidney, from Denmark, from Germany, from England and we can learn a lot from each others' practice and experiences.

So there are four levels of practice: local, regional, national and international. Happiness should be possible at a local level, in our daily practice. We recognize and we take into account the difficulties, the suffering that is going on in and around us. Our practice is just to deal with what is ... because the practice is not to get away from our real problems, our real difficulties, our real suffering. The practice, according to the path shown by the Buddha, is to recognize suffering as it is; to call it by its true name; and to learn the Dharma in such a way that the Dharma should be able to ease the deep causes of suffering, always. The division in families, the violence in schools and in society – all these have to be confronted with our mindfulness in order for us to see deeply the nature of suffering, how suffering has arisen, the making of suffering.

Ill-being, that is the first noble truth. The second noble truth is the making of Ill-being. We should develop a deep and very clear understanding of the making of Ill-being. We have to consider every cause that has led to the suffering – things like alcoholism and drugs, AIDS, violence, the breaking up of families. We have to look deeply into suffering to see exactly what are the causes. We have to call these by their true names. Understanding the nature of suffering is the practice – it is the second noble truth. When understanding of the second noble truth is deep, then naturally the path will emerge: the fourth noble truth – the path leading to the cessation of Ill-being. This is the same as the birth of well-being. So with understanding of the nature of Ill-being, the path leading to the cessation of Ill-being becomes apparent. The third truth is just the cessation of Ill-being.

It has been repeated and repeated that once the second noble truth is understood then the fourth noble truth will reveal itself. That is the true Dharma. The true Dharma should be embodied by the Sangha leader, by the OI member. You have to organize your daily life in such a way that that way of life can express the fourth noble truth – the path, the living Dharma.

It will bring great happiness if someone in the Sangha can embody the living Dharma. Your Sangha may be five people, ten people, twenty people, fifty people. If one of you can embody clearly the path, the living Dharma, that is wonderful. Then everyone can look to him, can look to her, in order to practice. Very soon the Sangha will carry the Dharma within itself; the Sangha will embody the Dharma. Once this happens, the Sangha will have become that most convincing element, the true Sangha, the living Sangha – the Buddha and the Dharma being contained within it. A true Sangha always carries within herself the true Buddha and the true Dharma. So, if you are a Sangha-builder, be sure that in the Sangha there are those that can embody the living Dharma. They live in such a way as to make the Dharma apparent – the Dharma not only in cassette tapes, books and Dharma talks but the Dharma in the way they live their daily life. So when considering training, OI members should remember that training does not mean taking in a lot of Buddhist studies, although Buddhist studies can be very helpful. We are looking for something more than Buddhist studies. At the Green Mountain Dharma Center, Sister Annabel offers teaching and training for OI members and for those who practice in mindfulness centers. She doesn't just offer Dharma talks. People go there and practice walking and sitting and other practices so they see that the living Dharma is more than a set of theories.

We can organize training on a local or regional level so that OI members can learn, can be trained. Members-to-be can be offered a chance to learn also because after practicing for one year a person might like to apply for ordination to become a member of the Core Community. If during that period of one year he or she has had no chance to train, then ordination would not be possible because it is based on the training and not on the desire to become a member of the Core Community alone. The desire is good but it is not enough. There should be training. So if you are a member of the Core Community, it is your path to train people in your local Sangha so that he or she knows what is the true Dharma, the practice and how to apply the Dharma in their family life and in social life. So the Dharma should be a very concrete way of life – the art of mindful living.

Many of you have met to talk about how to organize a regional event. This might be a gathering of seven or ten days for regional-level OI members and aspirants for ordination to come and receive training. You might ask one, two or three sisters from the root Sangha to come and help you. Or you might do it yourselves because among you there are OI members who are Dharma teachers, who are capable of training.

It is always possible to invite a few members of the root Sangha to come and help you and, of course, on a national level the root Sangha has to be involved in some way. There should be documents and materials to ensure that the training is done in very concrete terms so that during the training transformation can really become possible. In principle, OI members should be able to benefit in this way: to transform and heal during the time of training.

In any five-day, six-day retreat we see a lot of people transform – like the one we just offered at the University of Massachusetts when 850 people came for a retreat of six days. The quality of the retreat was very high and people enjoyed it so much. Reports on transformation came every day – many, many cases. Reconciliation was made among members of the family; reconciliation took place even with people who were not there, by a telephone call. If you had been at the retreat you would have experienced how the presence of those of us who have a solid practice is very helpful to other retreatants. There were at least 70 monastics at this retreat, which is quite a large number. Many OI members attended as well as other experienced practitioners. Then again

there were so many people new to the practice who had just read books and came to a retreat for the first time with no experience of practice, of vipassana or anything at all. They simply took part and enjoyed it very naturally – like a stream joining a big river. They are very happy and from many streams of society and there were plenty of young people – about 28 young people took the three refuges. If you talk to people such as the sisters and brothers who attended the retreat you will hear many stories of transformation, and these make us very happy.

I remember one day I invited all the children to come to sit on my deck – something like one hundred of them – and I invited all the schoolteachers to come as well – 100 of them. I asked them to talk to each other about their expectations and experiences. It was so wonderful.

Many people cried during the retreat because they heard about their own suffering and they learned the practical way out of suffering. And they got a lot of energy and they got many good seeds in themselves watered. Many of them regretted that the retreat did not last longer.

So, on the regional level we get a training not only for helping other people but to help us also.

At the end of a retreat we should come out as a stronger practitioner, a stronger Sangha-builder, a stronger and more skilful Dharma teacher. This should be organized regularly.

So please do use your intelligence, your power of organization, in order to arrange this because Sangha building is the most noble task. The most precious thing we can offer to our society is Sangha. So everyone has to learn to be a Sangha-builder. There are many monks, nuns and lay people who are excellent Dharma teachers – who can teach Buddhism very well – in Vietnam and in other countries, but not many have the skill of Sangha building.

My fixation, my desire is that every OI Member should learn the art of Sangha building because Sangha building should bring you a lot of happiness. With Sangha building you acquire a lot of merit because what we need desperately in our society is Sangha where people can come and feel embraced and feel understood and learn to see the path of emancipation. A true Sangha is what we need because a true Sangha always carries within itself the Buddha and the living Dharma. It is the living Dharma that makes the Sangha into a true Sangha, a living refuge for us and for our society.

So if you have time left for discussion, please give your attention to the questions of training and Sangha building.

Three sounds of the bell

Transcribed by Kate Atchley, The Vow of True Virtue