

DOM April 11th, 2026

Chanting From The Heart - Sr Dinh Nghiê - Practice of the Highest Understanding

Today we're going to continue the sutra, we're going to continue on the discourse on perfect understanding. So we're going to start with, we're going to continue with the second, the ninth verse, the five skandhas of the reading. Here we see the repetition of the other verses.

This is the Bodhisattva that looks deeply into the five skandhas to better understand the true nature, their true nature, which is emptiness. And when the Bodhisattva really understands this, they practice without being caught in the form and in the world. After this we're going to study the sutra on the three liberations.

So this verse is also a repetition. We're going to continue with the next verse. The five aggregates are empty.

Because she does not get caught in the form, her practice is called signless, where there is practice, there is not the highest understanding. There is nothing that can be called concentration, signlessness, and nirvana. So the first line, we've seen the five skandhas, so the five skandhas are empty, the five aggregates.

So the practice is that of signlessness, that of non-form. Here we see the same teaching as in the Sutra of the 42 Chapters. And there's a very famous line, my practice is the practice of non-practice.

My practice is the practice of non-practice. So the Buddha said to his disciples, he said to his disciples, my practice is the practice of non-practice, my practice. And the non-practice here is the practice of non-appearance.

So if I practice and I see that I practice and the other doesn't practice, then that's not the deepest understanding, the highest understanding. And somebody sees that I don't practice and that is a non-practice. So if you do, if you practice walking meditation in the metro, in the street and nobody sees that you are practicing walking meditation, then that's practice of the highest level.

If we think that we are practicing and we are attached to the form of this practice, then that's not a deep practice. And that's why in the next line, because she does not get caught in the form, her practice is called signlessness. And so this is, there has to be a concentration, a concentration of non-appearance.

We have seven concentrations. If we practice, if when we practice we see we practice, then we haven't attained highest understanding. We haven't attained the practice of non, the practice of non-appearance.

So the practice of not being attached to the form and the practice of non-practice is like the non-self. In the beginning, we see that we have a self and the Buddha teaches us that there is no real self. And we practice to let go of our separate self to understand the, to understand the true nature of the non-self.

And then I can be attached to the concept of non-self. And then I am also not free because I am attached from one extreme to another extreme. And so I'm still not free.

And in community, by living together, we recognize this phenomena of releasing, we recognize this phenomena of releasing one extreme to another extreme. And so it's very difficult to let go of the concept of self and then the non-self. So you can be in such a situation, you are doing walking meditation, you're thinking of something else.

And then in the community, there's no one that brings us back and that says something. And so there needs to be someone who tells us that plays the role of watching out over us. This person, this person is responsible for the mindfulness of the entire mob community.

And so this person reminds everyone, reminds everyone, be careful. If you're doing something, be mindful. And we can think, oh, but I'm practicing, but can say, oh, but I am practicing.

I'm practicing non-practice. And that can be even more difficult than being attached to the practice. So how do we recognize this attachment, this attachment of one extreme to another extreme? We can use suffering as a reference point, as a reference point.

Is this a practice of non-practice or is this an attachment to the words, to the concept of non-practice? So in situations where we cannot practice with the four, we can always, if we can see that we are practicing for creating joy and harmony in the community, and if instead, but if I cause suffering in my community, then there's something that is not wrong, that is not right. And that's why we can use suffering and interbeing as a reference point. So I tell this story about my brother with a lot of joy and love.

And I say this not to, I tell this story with love, but not to underestimate the practice of my brother. And one day Thay was not there and there was a formal dinner. And you know, on the autel, on the altar of the Buddha, there's always a flower and a plate, a beautiful plate with fruits, you know, in Thailand, fruits are like flowers.

We arrange it so that it's really beautiful on the altar. And this brother, at the end of the meal, he took an apple and he started eating it. For the practitioners, this is a lack of respect to the Buddha, because that's an offering that the community does to the Buddha on the altar with a lot of respect.

We give this to the Buddha and he just took an apple just like that and started eating it. And that's not respectful. But this monk did this to show that he is free.

I practice the non-form and I practice non-practice. But unfortunately, right after he did this, a little boy walked all the way to the altar and did exactly the same thing. He took an apple of the Buddha, offered to the Buddha, and naturally the little monk said to the little boy, no, you can't do that.

And everybody started to laugh. You can see that sometimes we want to practice the non-form, we want to practice the non-attachment to form, but it's just at an intellectual level, a mental level. So we can always remember that everything the Buddha taught us, we can transform suffering.

If it doesn't transform our suffering, then it has an effect contrary to it. Then it becomes an attachment to form, to words, and we will always have a tendency to grasp words, concepts, ideas, and then we think that we have understood, but if we put into practice this teaching in everyday life, then it is no longer an idea, a concept. It becomes our life and our experience in our daily life, and that is different.

And I remember when I was still here, when we had the idea that this person doesn't practice well or doesn't practice enough, and we would see that we practice or that the person doesn't practice or doesn't practice enough or not in the right way, and we wanted to find a solution. And I remember when there was a judgment that I practice and the other doesn't practice or not enough, and so I remember that I did not support discussions or arguments or such ideas. In particular, when we wanted the other person that the other person didn't practice well enough, so she cannot receive the lamp or cannot receive full ordination or she cannot become monastic, when or when.

I remember at this time, I didn't see profoundly, but I could see very clearly if there was an intention, if there was an idea of excluding or including or not. In listening profoundly, Thay would see right away and would say, what are my children doing? What are they thinking? Are they thinking about inclusion or are they thinking about exclusion? The same idea, but the same gesture, but when the intention is different, we can feel it in the energy. It's the energy of exclusion or energy of inclusion.

Even if we say, oh, yeah, we love that person very much, but, but, but, but we put forward some thoughts that are about this person, then the words cannot, the words don't reveal truth, because there's a full energy. And that is why, as soon as we have the idea that I practice or the other one doesn't practice enough or not well enough, then we fall into the form and we fall into attachment to form. And after all the, after many years of practice, Thay was very sensitive to that.

Our master was really sensitive and that is why at Plum Village, Thay was prioritizing and focusing on simplicity, but with a lot of content, the content of mindfulness, the content of concentration, and form and appearance are not a priority. But sometimes we need form to sustain, support the energy of mindfulness, of concentration, and to maintain the balance. Sometimes it's not easy.

That is why we, we saw in another, that we will see another verse, an element of, of, of good masters and good friends are really important. We will get to that verse later. And, and in another session, we have talked about the Diamond Sutra.

And the first teaching that I've offered for the transmission of the Lamp and the Fourteen-Methodist Training mentioned as well, also mentioned as well, this Sutra, the current Sutra and the Diamond Sutra to remind us that, to remind us that a member of interbeing is, is, is a, is, is not a member of interbeing. That's why he's a real member of

interbeing. A monastic is not a real monastic. And that's why she is a real monastic. A teacher is not a teacher. That's why he's a true teacher.

If I see that I am a teacher and you are not, therefore, right away, there's an idea, a concept of discrimination. The next verse, if, says, if he can practice this silent awakening, all the Buddhas of the past empower him. He knows the true nature of causes and conditions, conditions, neither suffering nor delight can touch him.

If he can, the silent awakening signifies nirvana, the extraction of concept and extension of form. Those who attain this silent awakenings can be certified of their awakening. So that's perfect understanding.

This absolute peace is the resultant of the perfect understanding. And once we understand the multiple causality of all of things, we are no longer affected by suffering nor by joy. We find again, we find this same teaching in the Prajna Paramita Sutra, Sutra of the Heart.

It's the same, it's the same teaching. In the, in the Heart Sutra, we sing the short version. And what we sing at in Plum Village is we, we, we sing Avalokita, but in Vietnamese, in Chinese, in, in, in, in the Chinese version, we sing not Avalokita, we, we sing Quang Thai, which means, Quang means to look profoundly, and Thu Thai means freedom.

And this name means the person who is totally free because of their deep, their capacity to look deeply. And that's exactly what described Avalokita in the Heart Sutra, in looking deeply into a reality is really complete, really understood the vacuity of the five skandhas, and transcendent, all suffering, and became totally free of all suffering, because of his deep looking into things. And he understood vacuity of his body, of his consciousness, of his five skandha, and the vacuity of the emptiness of, of the multiple causality of all things.

And his body is made of, of all the elements, non body. It's the cause, it's the multiple causality of all elements, of all the cosmos of all bodies. And when, when he realizes that, he's no longer affected by suffering and joy.

And in the, in the Diamond Sutra, the Buddha said that those who see the causality, the multiple causality of all things, the Buddha, the person who sees interbeing, the nature of interbeing, the non form or the non self, so this person sees the Buddha and can understand the Buddha. And he's no longer affected by the joy or suffering. And here we're talking about suffering and joy of every day, everyday suffering and joy.

And it's a pair of opposites of suffering and joy. Like the same pair of opposites, which is love and hate. I don't know if you have noticed that in the everyday life.

Sometimes we go from one extreme to the other. When we love somebody, we love them with all our heart. We love them more than ourselves.

But, when something happens, we can hate them, the same person, as much as we've hated, I've loved that person, that love, that hate, are the love and hate of everyday life. That what we call in Buddhist literature, we call that love and hate mundane. Oh, going up and down.

But when we talk about the true love, it doesn't, it doesn't go up and down. And, and when someone loves you from a true love, you feel very in, in, in security, because you know, whatever you do, that person will not go from love to hate. That person won't hate you.

Because that love is a true love. And it's the same thing for joy. When it's a joy that it's founded in or happiness that's founded upon the form of the five skandhas on what is empty, then this joy will go, rise and fall.

And that joy can become sadness, or affliction, or suffering. But when we practice, for example, meditation, a that provides us with joy, or when we have a practice, and we feel something that comes from the practice, that feeling is more profound, this joy, this wellness feeling is more profound, because, because we can create it ourselves with our own practice, which is not based on, on reliant on external conditions. With our practice, even if the joy disappears, we can recreate it, because we know how, more or less, the more your practices of is from long standing practice, you will be able to create it more easily.

And we, and we're, we don't, we're not yo-yos that go up and down, up and down, because we have no sovereignty, because something comes from another person or external conditions. And here, with deep looking, the bodhisattva is no longer affected by this up and down, and is not affected by joy or suffering. But, of course, because he is totally free, he must have a feeling of lightness, of wellness, that transcends those pairs of opposites, transcends the concepts, notions.

So, we'll go on to the next verse, because this sutra is very long, and so we're going to have to speed up a bit. If she practices with no object of her practice, she practices in accord with the wisdom of the Sugata. If she practices, so in the book of the Chanting of the Heart, there's a sutra that speaks of this.

If she practices with the spirit of non-practice, this is the highest understanding. So, this is a repetition of what we've already said. The practice without object cannot be grasped.

So, like earlier, we saw that we always have this tendency with our intellectual faculties to grasp this idea of non-practice. But the only thing that we can truly do is to put this into practice, this idea of non-practice, to put it into practice. The foolish people are caught in the signs being and non-being.

So, when we translate it, we use the term foolish, but in the original, it would say the idiot. So, neither being nor non-being can express the truth. So, neither being nor non-being can express the truth.

The Bodhisattva of awakened understanding transcends both. So, why is it illusory, this concept of being and non-being? It depends on the circumstances. That's why they're not fixed, they're not true.

That's why they're both illusory, fictitious. You remember when we were in kindergarten, we could see clearly that friends, you know, could change from one day to the next. So, one day we could be friends with one and the next day with the other.

One day they'll hate one and the next they'll hate another. And when we see children like that, we can laugh, we can smile, but adults are exactly the same. And so, this love and hatred, they're very illusory.

They're not of a true nature because they change continuously. So, understanding this, then the Bodhisattva is liberated from the words and the form. The Bodhisattva becomes free.

The Bodhisattva free of sign knows that the five aggregates are a magic show. His practice is a silent awakening, which is the practice of highest understanding. So, we find this same sutra later on.

In India, in the past, you would find magicians in the middle of the square that would do magic tricks. And when we see when it's a magic show, it's not true, it's illusory. When we understand this, we're not afraid anymore.

We are not afraid to see, for instance, a decapitation. I remember going to a virtual museum. Does anybody remember this story? Have anybody heard this experience that I shared last year? So, let me tell you.

You know, my nieces and my nephews, when they come to Plum Village, one day I heard one of the nuns say, oh, there's this virtual museum, you really have to go in Bordeaux. And so, I brought my niece there. They didn't really use the term virtual museum, they used another term, but it's a little room and we paid and we put on these virtual reality goggles and headsets.

And I chose, there were four programs and you could go underwater or to the forest. And I chose to go to Egypt because I had never been there. And so, we put on our goggles and our headsets.

And then instantaneously, I was able to travel to Egypt. I was on top of a pyramid and I could see all over. I could see the temples and I went onto a boat and I knew that it wasn't true.

I knew it wasn't real. I heard the sounds and I could see this. And yet, when I was there, at one point, I hunched over, I bent down, I had to bend down to go into a tunnel and I was afraid of falling because I was on top of a pyramid.

And I felt, I really felt everything. And at one point, I removed the goggles and I saw that I was in this room and it was empty. And this group of people that were there with me, we were all moving around, inching step by step.

And I knew it wasn't real, but when I put the goggles back on, there were all these sensations again of being on top of a pyramid, entering a temple. And you know, at the end of this movie, 40 minutes later, we exited the room and we removed our goggles and we laughed. And after 40 minutes, we were exhausted.

And that experience showed me that my sense organs and just the eyes and the ears and that the perception gained all of my being and the sensations were so strong and real. Even my mind knew that it wasn't true, but my mental faculties could not resist the physical sensations I was feeling. And then I understood what trauma was really about.

Even when they know that it's not true, the physical sensations, bodily sensations are so profound, so real. And the only way for me to escape from that was to remove the goggles, to change setting, to change environment, because my mind was not strong enough to overpower, if you like, my sense organs. And now when I try to look back, so trying to look back when you were a child or a teen or something that happened three years ago, and when you think back to what happened then, and now I'm not talking about traumatic experiences.

I'm talking about just simple or about experiences that made us cry. And when we think back at those moments, do you have the impression that it's like you were in a movie? Often in my family with my brothers and sisters, when we remember our experiences back in Vietnam or my first years in France, with members of my family, we say, ah, it's like in the movies. We laughed a lot.

We cried a lot. We've done a lot of things. But when we look back, when we think back at certain events, we think, ah, it was worth suffering so much.

It's like this story that I've told you, like of a group of children that were playing and there was a person from a higher level observed these children. Do you remember this story? And these children, they played and they organized. What did they do exactly? They built something that you had to pay for to see what the children had prepared.

And so to pay, they had to rip out a button on their shirt or their blouse. And so there was a little girl that didn't have a button and so she wasn't able to pay to be able to see. And so she cried and cried and she really suffered.

And she didn't have this button to be able to pay for this ticket. And so this person that was at a higher level, she observed what was happening with what the children were doing. And you can imagine, you can imagine that you are this person.

And we are like these children in our daily life. We can suffer deeply. We can suffer just like this little girl who was not able to pay for a ticket because she didn't have a button.

Before I said that, when I was in this virtual room to visit Egypt, the moment where I removed the mask and the goggles to remind myself that everything around me was virtual and not real, it's as if that moment, that's the moment of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara who looked deeply into things and see and understands deeply that our five skandhas are empty. He changed goggles, he changed mask to have another perception, to have a just perception. And the Bodhisattva knows that all the five skandhas are like magic.

The body, free of signs, knows that the five aggregates are a magic show, is practice, is sealed awakening, which is the practice of the Ayurveda. It is no longer attached to the form. The practice of full peace is nirvana practice.

It is the practice of full understanding. It is no longer attached to the form of the practice. And that's the practice of perfect understanding, meaning the freedom from form, from words.

And the next verse, taught by good teachers and spiritual friends, there is no fear of hearing of the mother of all discourses. But with deluded teachers and friends traveling the wrong path, he is like claypot that has not been fired. Here we can, we're talking about the environment, the community of the sangha, because we are made by our environment, more or less affected by our surroundings.

When we can have here, the deluded teachers and bad friends are taking us on the wrong path. You know, when you have an idea, and sometimes that idea doesn't correspond to a just idea. When these thoughts are not, it's not right thought, we have a tendency to always, I always have a tendency to be, to come close to that person.

If I know, yeah, I'm going to stay close to the person who will agree with me because we have the same vision. We are very close. We understand each other.

And therefore, I always have the tendency to go towards a person that, such a person that will agree with me if I share an idea. But if another, if I go another sister, I'm sure that she will not agree with me. Therefore, I will not go and share with her.

I won't share my feelings, my thoughts. And if I have a thought that is not just, then, and I'm looking for someone that's going to be in agreement with me. And I can, and she says, I understand you and I agree, but then she's, that's a bad friend.

Because it's a bad friend because it, she reinforces, she confirms my wrong thought. And a friend, and a good friend, and a good master that will tell me no, no, no, you have to think in a different way. Because that, your thinking doesn't go in the direction of love, inclusivity, interbeing, and interdependency.

Therefore, in general, a good master or a good friend, generally, most of the time, are persons that we're not seeking. We're not seeking to listen to them because we want to hear, we want to hear people who are in agreement with us. As Thay says, and since Thay says that most of our perceptions are false, and if we always looking for somebody who agrees with us, therefore, these people can reinforce our thoughts, our ideas, our false ideas and thoughts.

Therefore, it's better when we have such thoughts, it's better to practice mindful breathing, mindful walking, and return to our practice, instead to look for somebody to share, to, we have the impression that sharing with somebody will free us from suffering, but it could, it can't do that, but sometimes it reinforces our false thinking. But sometimes, even often, we have good friends who don't agree with us, who are saying a different thing that we think, and we, in that instance, we are very lucky. But by good teachers and spiritual friends, there is no fear of hearing the mutters of all Buddha discourses, because this sutra tells us that something different than our habits, and if listening to this is contrary to our belief, it can cause anxiety.

But with deluded teachers and friends traveling the wrong path, it is like a clay pot that has not been fired. That's a metaphor that the Buddha has used to talk about, of the six paramitas, to talk about our awakening, about our understanding. When a clay pot that has not been fired, when we put water in such a pot, then the water will come out through the pores and cracks.

When it's well cooked, well fired, it can contain water for a long time, and water will not come out. When we practice according to the perfect understanding, we are like a clay pot. If we are like a clay pot that's well fired, well cooked, all the results we have from the practice stay within.

On the contrary, if we are attached to words, to concepts, to ideas, to form, then we cannot contain anything. Like mindfulness energy, or concentration energy, it will leave, and nothing will be left. We cannot keep anything as a result.

So, diligence, patience, meditation, profound vision, all without perfect understanding and deep vision. Whatever we do, whatever we practice as generosity, patience, there will be nothing left as a beautiful result. Because we are attached to the word, or to the form, and so therefore the result is empty, and nothing is left as a benefit, as a result.

For example, if I offer a gift to my sister, and I remember that I did such, and therefore as a return she should be nice to me, and now I'm asking for help, and then she should say yes, and she's busy, and has not said yes, and because she's busy, then all of that, the gift that I gave her no longer has any benefit. But on the contrary, if I offered her a gift, and I'm not saying always to myself, and I'm not reminding to myself, she has received a gift from me, if I'm not attached to this idea, if I don't see me as somebody who's offered a gift, therefore the joy is great, the freedom is great, there is no expectations from myself, there is no anger, there is no deception, there is nothing. The happiness is great for me, for her, and there's freedom, there's space, it doesn't create an expectation, disappointment, attachment, all of that.

And that is why when we practice diligence of the mindfulness training, patience, generosity, and meditation to have nice results, you have to practice without attachment. And in this case, the claypot is well fired, or well cooked. What do we call a bodhisattva? She who is no longer caught by sensual desire, she who aspires to the fruit of awakening.

So you know that in original Buddhism, there was this word bodhisattva, but it designated the Buddha before he became the Buddha. The Buddha spent many lives meditating, he was in hell, he was once an animal, a turtle, and then he became a bodhisattva. And there was a bodhisattva Shakyamuni before he became the Buddha, but in Mahayana, everyone that has a big heart and that practices for the well-being of everyone is a bodhisattva.

And here, all the way up to this verse, the word bodhisattva was mentioned already eight times. And so in this verse, it's the ninth time that the word bodhisattva is used. It's someone who is not attached to the form.

And if we've received the five mindfulness trainings, in the introduction of these trainings, it's clearly said that when we receive these trainings, we're already on the path of the bodhisattva. We are a bodhisattva. And all these verses explain what a bodhisattva is.

If we want to progress on this path, we can ask ourselves, am I a bodhisattva? What is a bodhisattva in this verse? It's someone who is not attached to practice. But in the original version, I'm sorry that the translations are not always so similar, as accurate as I would like

them to be. Someone who is not attached to the actions of desire, no longer caught by sensual desires.

It's someone who is no longer attached to actions motivated by desire. That's the meaning. And it's someone who aspires without attachment.

Someone who aspires to awakening without attachment. So there are two points. First, the bodhisattva is no longer attached to desire or to mundane desires, worldly desires.

And the second point, he aspires to awakening and practices without being attached to being awakened. So of course, when we practice, we practice to have less worldly desires. We look deeply.

We look at the objects of our desires. And that's why, on the one hand, we are no longer attached to the actions. And on the other hand, we're no longer attached to the form and the ideas of awakening.

And that is a bodhisattva. So there are six minutes left. So is there anyone that has a question? Burning questions.

So we have six minutes for a burning question. If there are no questions, well, very good. That means that everything is clear and complete.

You remember when I read the word, once he has understood the causality of everything. I thought immediately of Ananda when the Buddha taught the multiple causality of everything. The Buddha asked Ananda, did you understand? And Ananda said, yes, I understood.

The Buddha said, no, no, no, don't say that. This teaching is very deep. Don't think that you understood it.

Because this teaching is very, very deep, very profound. And it takes years to put it into practice and to truly understand. The Buddha said this, for me, I understood that first, we must not try to understand with our intellect, with our mental faculties.

Because before this story, I thought I understood. But when we think we understand, it's very dangerous. Because when we think we understand, we know, we don't have this curiosity anymore to learn, to study, to progress on our path.

I could be satisfied with what I heard and that's it. And I'm satisfied. And then I look for something else to learn.

And that's how I run from one teaching to another, from one thing to another. Because I love to have a knowledge of Buddhism. And then I forget to put it into practice.

And by looking, I saw time. And by looking at the community, he saw clearly how much we suffer. How much we are happy and joyous, joyful.

And when he saw there were still some conflicts and sufferings and affliction. That means that we didn't put into practice these teachings enough. That means that we still remain as a certain level.

And we may have, that's why he would repeat and repeat and repeat. He would tell us to practice mindfulness of breathing, walking, meditation, coming back to ourselves. There's Denise Bernard that has a question.

We still have one more minute. So the question is, a member of interbeing is not a member of interbeing, therefore he is a member of the order of interior being. So I wonder what distinguishes us from others.

And then what is the purpose of this brown vest? And that's, so this is a very good question. So the Buddha reminded the monks and the nuns to touch our head, to remind us that we are monks and nuns. When we remember this, then we are a member of the order of interbeing or the purpose of practicing.

And not to remind ourselves that we are a monastic or a member of the order of interbeing. And I remember when I received the 40 mindfulness trainings, I received the precepts, I remembered that I had to practice. That's what it is.

But it's not to distinguish myself. I am a monastic or I'm a member of OI. It's a reminder to come back to ourselves and to practice.

And the shaved head or the brown vest or the sangati as a monastic, we have to keep our sangati as a reminder of our vows. A reminder that we engaged ourselves on this path, a reminder of our practice. It's a reminder to come back to ourselves.

But it's not a reminder of our differentiation from another, of our difference from another. If this reminder is a reminder towards another, then there's this separation. And that can be a form of discrimination.

But if it's a reminder of myself, then we are safe. Thank you.