

# **DOM March 14, 2026**

## **Chanting From The Heart - Sr Dinh Nghiêm - Practice of the Highest Understanding**

Hello, good morning everyone, good afternoon, good evening as well. I hope today to be able to finish early so that we can continue with some sharing and we can share about how we live, how we practice the last sutra, the sutra on how to live alone, a better life, way to live alone. It's a reflection of the mirror.

I received a number of questions in the last month or so. So in our both chanting of the heart, of the sutra that we're going to study today, the discourse is actually the most difficult one. The sutra is part of, is part of the highest practice of highest understanding, part of Krishna Paramita, of the Mahanayana school tradition, and during the first session I discussed it, but I want to reiterate, to repeat, we have some specific terms.

So when we studied this, the sutra in the original version, the original Buddhism is situated from the first teaching of the Buddha. So Buddhist, original Buddhism is the Buddhism that was initially taught by the Buddha. A hundred years later, there were several traditions that developed that could have been up to 22, 24 traditions, and up to the first century before Christ.

So this period is called Buddhism of multi-traditional Buddhism. So the disciples of the Buddha continue to put in practice the teachings of the Buddha and different traditions, schools, every school, every tradition, have their own teachings, have their own study of the Vinaya, of the sutras, and every school have their own explanations of the teachings of the Buddha. And as of the first century before Christ, there was a big movement, a big school that appeared, and that is the Mahayana Buddhism.

And that the Mahayana tradition is a reaction to the multi-traditional or the multi-traditions, and this big movement arose, and it was called Mahayana, and Mahayana, of course, at the beginning received a lot of resistance and opposition, because when you say Mahayana, we imply differences. Maha means big, yana means vehicle, so it means the great vehicle. And so when we say great vehicle, we also imply small vehicles.

And so the schools that didn't belong to the Mahayana traditions, those traditions didn't like the term because they felt that they were part of the small vehicle. But the Mahayanists, so those that, the adepts of the Mahayana tradition, they had a reaction to the Buddhists that only wanted to practice for themselves. So when the Buddha entered nirvana, there was a tendency to enter in a lot of debates and analysis during the time of the Buddha.

And the Buddha taught us how to transform suffering, and the teachings were very down to earth. But with time, there was a tendency to analyze, and the Buddhists were very careful, paid a lot of attention to the debates and the analysis and interpretations, and with time, it became something very different than the original Buddhism. And that reaction occurred with the disciples, the monks and the nuns, together with the lay people.

And they worked together to write the text, to write the sutras. And you know, when Thay was a young monk in Vietnam, Thay didn't have the opportunity to be in touch with, to come in contact with the scientific teachings of the sutra. And in the 1970s, when Thay went to the Sombon, Thay had the opportunity to study, to study the text, and Thay discovered and saw that there was a profound study supported by science and to see which, and was able to see which sutras were written at what time.

And so there was this idea that all the sutras were taught, were taught by the Buddha. During the big gatherings, the disciples, when the monks recited the sutras, Ananda was there. And so he would say, and so I heard the Buddha say, and so it was the disciples and Ananda that recited the sutras.

And later on, we discovered that there were a lot of sutras that were not recited by Ananda during these three big gatherings. So we discovered that there were sutras that were not recited by the Buddha. And so there were a lot of texts that were written before, but also after the death of the Buddha.

And they also started with, and when I heard, one day I heard the Buddha say, and that would put extra weight to the sutra. So today, if Sister Annabelle or Sister Chang Kong or Brother Phap Hu would give the teachings, he would be able to give their own teachings with their own understanding. But we also see that the teachings that they gave, that they came from their master by time because they received the teachings from time and practiced in accordance to the practices and teachings of time.

And so they're a continuation of time. And so they don't need to say that this is a teaching given by time. And they can give this teaching without any problems.

And everybody appreciates it. Everybody appreciates that these are Thay's teachings. And in the first sessions, I also told you that we have to recognize the sutras.

If it's a sutra of that school or this other school. So the sutras in of the original Buddhism, the sutras given by the Buddha, he would teach them to Shariputra, Mohammed Ghaniana. At the time they didn't use, they didn't use the name of the Bodhisattva Avalokita.

And when there was this movement, this trend, this movement towards Mahayana, the Bodhisattva Avalokita arose because Avalokita is a great being that helps the world to suffer less. All the Bodhisattvas, just like Avalokita, Avalokita Mara, Thich Nhat Hanh, they made a vow to help everyone in the world. And they made a vow to stay in this world until there was no one who suffered in the world.

And so you find these Bodhisattvas in the Mahayana tradition. And this was contrary to other traditions, which was practicing for oneself. But you know, one day I shared with you, I shared with you our practice and to have a balance.

If we always have to go and help other people without coming back to ourselves and come back to ourselves and consolidate our own practice, at one point we can lose ourselves. We can, we can have a burnout. We can be completely exhausted.

That's the case of a lot of social workers that want to help and that work a lot, but they don't come back to themselves and to take care of themselves at some point. And at one point they can't continue. And that's why it's so important to come back to ourselves at every single, at every moment that we can, so that we can gain strength without the practice of coming back to ourselves and cultivating and consolidating our inner strength, we can help a lot of people.

And our tendency is to go towards extremes, when the Buddha entered nirvana. So after the Buddha entered nirvana, there was this tendency to, to practice with all our hearts a hundred percent. And that practice went to an extreme.

And so people went to the forest not to be disturbed or to be distracted by the world around them. And that's why when we go to an extreme, because of the nature of interbeing, then the other extreme appears. And this tendency to practice, 200%.

So the school of Mahayana taught us not to live in a separate, in a world separate from ourselves, but to help. I remember I shared this with you before. There's nothing wrong, there's nothing wrong if we make the vow to practice, to transform our suffering.

That's how I started. So when I arrived at Plum Village to become a novice, my aspiration was exactly that. I didn't feel very good.

There were other aspirants at the time that really wanted to serve and wanted to help. And as for me, it was very clear to me, I wanted to practice so I could face loss, the loss of somebody dear to me and also death. So I wanted to practice to resolve this problem, this weakness I saw in myself.

And in that environment, in that, at Plum Village, I was nourished every day by Thay's teachings, by my master's aspiration, and the aspirations of the community around me. Because we are what we consume. And I consumed the teachings, the practice, I consumed a lot of nourishment from my fellow monks and nuns and my master and my teacher.

And without noticing it, I changed little by little. And now I practice to serve and to help other monks and nuns. And because it's become very natural, it's become very natural.

And now I see Géraldine who's giving me a big smile because Géraldine spent a lot of time at Plum Village. So a couple of years. So what I practice, what I share with you, she knows this.

But the aspirants in my time who wanted to serve. I'm sorry, I don't hear Sister Ding-Yim anymore. Okay.

So the aspirants receive the teachings of time. They continue on the way. And some of them are gone.

Some people have left. Some people have left but didn't learn how to come back enough to themselves and consolidate within themselves their strengths. And so at one point they left because there were other things they wanted to do.

It also caused a lot of freedom. And they were not surrounded by a community that importance here is the balance. Time always leads early Buddhism to a practice, to a school, to a world, to a practice, to a tradition, a combination of several schools.

Early Buddhism, meditation, ceremony, this chant and the ceremonies, we can say that it is part of the strong joy that a lot of chantees every day reciting the name of the Buddha. We don't chant so much but we still practice chanting. So we will read the sutra.

So our question is mentioned in the practice of the highest understanding. We go over the Heart Sutra, the Prajnaparamita. We recite the name ceremony but this sutra, this Heart Sutra, was not written at a specific place but it was written several centuries from the first one of this literature.

It was written a century before but it has been translated in the Chinese canon in the 11th century, a long time after. At the end of the book, Chanting for the Heart, the sutra was translated from the Prajnaparamita Samjhayana Sutra and we get translated the highest understanding sutra translated at the beginning of the 11th century. It was the first sutra of the highest understanding in the Prajnaparamita literature and in the sutra there are all the several sorts of the Prajnaparamita.

I would like to know if you related the website Living Friends. I'm sure that many of you already. So, how many of you saw that? Recently we opened Living Friends to the public.

Of course, you need to register and you can enter the library. How would you feel about the teachings of Thai Buddha? All the teachings, the teachings of Thai, Odra, in Vietnamese, in English and in French. When you listen to a teaching, next to it you have the translation in the language you wish, the translation you practice, all the teachings, all the teachings, all words, also about the sutras.

There's already around a thousand people who registered and enjoyed. And we can also translate the sutra as the sutra of the walk, the practice of the highest understanding. Why the walk? Because it's like a big task.

We go on a journey, a journey of contemplation, a walk of contemplation. And on this walk, we will discover this highest understanding, all the practice, sutra of the practice of the highest understanding. And we really need to use all our body, our heart, our mind to go on this walk, to practice, to really understand the perfect understanding.

Because the understanding is the foundation of love, happiness, the foundation of the wisdom. And on the 7th century, in India, they made statues in the shape of a woman. And the highest understanding is seen as the mother of all Buddhas, all the Buddhas, all the sadhmas, and ourselves.

If we practice from all our hearts, we are also the child of the highest understanding. You can see that it's in the verse. But once I find a way to live alone, I read a sutra, and when you see the verses, you need to know that it's the highest verses.

You can know that it's an ancient sutra, more ancient than the sutras in prose. Why? Because at the time of the Buddha, the teachings were as poems. And that's how we're reciting, and that's how the transmission is.

But when it's in the verse, it's here, it rhymes, there's also really a structure. When we add words, it's missing, it's a bit weird. We cannot add it.

That's why the verse is the original form of the teachings. So now we're going to read the first lines. Bodhisattvas, who in this life endeavor to remove all obstacles and afflictions, give rise to a peaceful mind with confidence, dwelling in awakened calm, rely on the practice of the highest understanding.

So in these first lines, we can see that it's from a Mahayana tradition, because it starts with Bodhisattvas. These Bodhisattvas, they serve the world. Everything they do is for the benefit of the world, not just for themselves, but for the well-being of the world, to put an end to all obstacles and suffering.

That's the first aspiration, intention. The second aspiration of the Bodhisattva is to put an end to all suffering. Why also obstacles? Because on the path of practice, on the path towards joy, there are obstacles.

We talk about afflictions as obstacles. Attachments to views is also an obstacle. And these are big afflictions, great afflictions.

So the first intention is for the benefit of the world. The second is to put an end to all suffering. And when we read these two lines, maybe there's nothing special, because we read a lot of sutras and texts.

And these words might not have any particular meaning for us. But at that time, during the first century B.C., these words were really important. The Bodhisattvas.

So what is a Bodhisattva? So the Bodhisattva is somebody who has a clear intention for the well-being of the world. They have no personal interest. So everything they do is for the benefit of the world, the well-being of the world.

And if we put all our heart and our body, and when we read the sutra and we remember the times when this was written and taught, we see that these words are very important. And many people heard these words for the very first time. Put an end to all obstacles and afflictions.

In the second line, there's nothing specific, nothing special. We know that the teachings of the Buddha is the Four Noble Truths, suffering, the causes of suffering, putting an end to suffering. There's nothing particular to it.

But if we come back to ourselves, and we observe every day, even I can recognize when I lose my way in a community, in a sangha, I'm there with all my heart. I'm there with a good intention. I want to serve the community.

I want to do everything for the well-being of the community. But if I'm not careful, sometimes my intention is no longer putting an end to suffering. It becomes something else.

In the name of the community, I want to build my community. I want to do things this way or that way. I want to be true to the Thai tradition.

But in doing that, I become angry, and I don't look at my sister next to me. I enter into a conflict. I want to have a last word in this conflict.

I want to win. Then I lose sight of my initial aspiration. If during the day, I see all of these emotions in me, the anger, the need to fight, to win, and look at my initial aspiration, which is to put an end to all suffering, that's why it's very important when we read these lines and we come back to ourselves and observe ourselves, what happens inside us.

We must not remain stuck at an intellectual level. We have to live with our bodies. We have to observe.

We have to look at my day, at my life. Look at, do I remember what my initial aspiration is, and that is to put an end to suffering. Who aspires to true faith in nirvana? This sentence, this line means that we have unshaking faith in nirvana.

In awakening. Sometimes in our daily life, in our community, our family, our sangha, we say our why will never change. There's no point in talking to her because she'll never change.

But if we look at this in this way, that means that we don't have true faith in nirvana. We don't believe in transformation. We don't believe in the truth of impermanence.

We don't believe in the capacity to transform. We don't believe in the nature of the Buddha, in the other person. They don't have faith in nirvana.

So these bodhisattvas, they have intentions that we've just spoken of to engage themselves on the way of perfect, the highest understanding. Because that leads to liberation and awakening. There's no other path.

So these first lines, they're like a proclamation. They're like a definition, a definition of the bodhisattva and the definition of Mahayana as well. Because the bodhisattva is a being that was born in this tradition in Mahayana.

We're going to continue with the following lines. It's already three o'clock. One hour already passed by.

So the second verse, I will take five more minutes. It's thanks to the energy of the king dragon, producing the healing herb, fresh fruits and flowers. And we have the explanation at the end of the page.

You know, we don't have this explanation in the book in English or in Vietnamese. It's only in the book in the French version. When I did this book, all the words, and I think, oh, maybe you don't understand these words.

And I look up in the English dictionaries to add up this explanation, all the rivers on Roseapple Island. To sum it up, I would like that in the next two weeks, we will practice. We will look within to see if we think like a bodhisattva in this first verse, do we think of others when we practice? Do we think of others? Is our intention, our first intention, the priority is to end all suffering? Do we have the aspiration and we have faith in nirvana and the transformation and liberation and enlightenment? These three elements.

So before the last teaching, because we know that, so when we studied the Middle Way Sutra, so it's before the last time we met, before two weeks ago, because we know that this is

because that is each gesture should be put with mindfulness, awareness, and under the light of insight, because this gesture, this action will have consequences for ourselves, for others, and for the whole universe. But at the same time, I understand that in Buddhism, also in other traditions, just as Taoism, Sufism, we need to be detached from the results to do things with spontaneity, without being worried, with a natural order. How to solve and go beyond this paradox? In Buddhism, the non-action, yes, means like to be detached from the results, but I don't agree, it's not to do things spontaneously without worrying about, it's always with mindfulness, it's always to do things with mindfulness.

Maybe with spontaneously, but at the same time with mindfulness, because we can understand the word spontaneously differently. I think this word spontaneously is the cause of the question, because spontaneously sometimes some people might think that spontaneously it means that we just do without thinking, just like that, without paying attention, but the word spontaneously, spontaneously also means naturally, but when we practice, I'm thinking about our master, the master of our master, or spiritual ancestors, I think of them, there are moments, there were moments where I felt like they were really natural, very spontaneous, like children, but because mindfulness is already their lives, their breathing, mindfulness becomes a way of life, mindfulness is not separated anymore from their way of living, from their way of life, and that's why even when they are spontaneous, their actions, their speech, were also the right speech or the right action. It's like the Noble Eightfold Path, when there is the right mindfulness, the rest becomes right, the right speech, the right action.

For us, to me, when I'm spontaneous, I can do something a little bit, you know, like anything, because I don't always have mindfulness with me, you know, but when someone practices to a level where mindfulness is always there, there's still consciousness, so even when there's spontaneity and they're natural, there's still mindfulness in them, and that's why the practice, the non-action is really, it's not, it's not the opposite of the action, it doesn't mean that I don't do anything, but it describes a state, really advanced states in the practice, people who don't need to do anything, but their presence, their energy brings a lot, their presence already brings a lot to their environment. Hello everyone, thank you sister, the name for the teaching, my question was more like, you were talking about a place where we could find all the teachings from the Thai, where is it that we can register to have access to this? So you need to go to the website, anyone already registered to explain? You need to go on the website, Plum Village website, and there's a section called Living Gem, and you can register, you can subscribe, and you can simply click on it, anybody already registered and can explain, and can explain to our friend that somebody replied in the chat, you can see the link, [plumvillage.org](http://plumvillage.org), gems, thank you. If there's no other question, we can continue with another verse, there are three questions, I'm listening, the communication is not so good, it's not easy to know if we are speaking, so I will start, thank you so much for your teachings sister, it's not really a question, maybe more like a reflection, like a contemplation, it was really good for me to hear how you came to the practice, and how your practice was at first to relieve her big suffering, connected to grieving, and life brings many surprises, many challenges that we don't expect, and sometimes it's as if the practice, like we're already on our way to others, and sometimes we have the challenges in life, and we need to go back to ourselves, breathe, and take care of our own suffering, and this for me brought a lot of guilt, but I really appreciate that you reminded to us today that it starts with ourselves, if we want to help others, and we don't need to feel guilty about this, so that's what I wanted to express, thank you, so I thank you

again, I really appreciate your teachings, thank you, I don't see you, where are you? I hear your voice, it's a good question, where am I? I'm not sure, I see myself, but I see you, what's your name? Pierrette, thank you Pierrette, Laurence, can you hear me now? Yes, I was saying, dear Thay, dear Sister Denis, dear friends, thank you for this teaching, and I had a question regarding the first verse of today, that resonates with a question, with a personal question I have for a time, and in a way joins the question from Pierrette, so in other terms, because at first, Sister Denis, you reminded the story of the evolution of Buddhism, between the early Buddhism, and I would say it's like a historical approach, how it evolves, and how it developed in history, and today, how do we keep this as two approaches, the early Buddhism, but I don't know if, maybe, maybe I don't see so clearly, but in my own experience, I feel like it's not so much either one or the other, that we practice, we can, I cannot really make the distinction, so like, oh, I'm practicing Theravada or Mahayana, because you can, we cannot really do one without the other, and from what you were sharing today, and from my own experience, what happens is that to, to good for others, for the world, is our final aspiration, but we always need to stop in this aspiration to also bring good to ourselves, so we keep on going, not really back and forth, not back and forth between the two schools, but they're kind of in each other, and as you said, when you were a novice, you started with a Hinayana approach, like many of us, but if still today, for example, in the way of doing, for example, if there is a meeting, and there's a conflict, we need to stop and take care of our own suffering, and also, sometimes, I'm not sure if it's our own suffering, because actually, I think there's not many sufferings that are really our own, except maybe our physical pain, like if it's coming from our body, then I can see that it's coming from ourselves, but, or psychological suffering, it doesn't feel like it's mine or the other, I feel it's suffering from interaction, from situation, not personal, it's from tensions, or conflict, let's imagine many people, maybe there is a family situation, let's imagine, for example, that I get in a fight with my mother, it's not my own suffering, it's not that I am mean, or my mother is mean, it's the interaction, so it's the interaction we need to heal, so there we need to do at the same time the Hinayana and the Mahayana approach at the same time, and so I feel that it's interesting to have the historical approach to distinguish those two schools, but at the same time, like 1600 years later, we don't really know, but it's a didactic approach, let's say, but in the practice, we do everything at the same time, so my question is, is it something personal, I'm mixing everything, or I just wanted to know your vision about this, thank you, thank you for the question Laurence, so when we study, we use words, we classify, but there's not a clear frontier between this school and this school, if we talk about early Buddhism, even for 45 years of the Buddha's teachings, it evolved, it changed, and around the end of the Buddha's life, and if we say that we go back to the Buddha's teachings at the beginning, and we say, dear Buddha, you said that, that, this and that, but why later you said something different, and even during the 45 years of the Buddha's teachings, there were many evolutions, and if we get attached to one specific point, or one word, or some aspects, then we can't say that this is the early Buddhism, and that's why the Buddha was very careful, he said that when reaching the enlightenment, he said that he said nothing, because he knew that it's very easy for us to get attached to words, to details, and we can lose the whole, and it's the same for as soon as we classify, as soon as we try to put into categories, so we need to remember that this is really for study, or to see clearer, but it's not at all the truth, it doesn't reflect the truth, and even when the Buddha, for example, when our master drew a circle to show the the store consciousness, and the mind consciousness, and he said, but it doesn't, it's not the truth, this drawing cannot show us the truth, it cannot, it can help us to understand, and it's the same in Hinayana, there is already the Mahayana,

because all the sorts of Mahayana are already in the early Buddhism, in the Buddha's teachings, and in the Mahayana, you can also find many elements of the early Buddhism, because from the early Buddhism, the Mahayana was born, and the next verse that we will study, it's clearly said that all the teachings in this sutra come from the Buddha, from the early Buddhism, so there's no distinction, there's no limit, clear limit, and in the past there were people who were attached to those limits, to this distinction, and suffered, and created a lot of suffering, and there were also conflicts, things like this, and we should know that our master Thay really took the best, the cream from all traditions to study, to put into practice, and that's why when he was in Thailand, he was really well welcomed by the Theravada monks in Thailand, when he went to China, Korea, he was really welcomed by the monks in the Mahayana tradition, because Thay took the Buddha's teachings without discrimination from this or this school, he really enjoyed fully the whole wisdom, no matter if it was belonging to this or this school, and now in our tradition, it's really clear that the foundation of our practice are the two sutras that teach the Buddha thought himself, the better way to live alone, the mindful breathing sutras, those two are the foundation, and then there's so many other sutras that bring light on these two sutras that enrich us, and when someone, if someone asks us, and you, which tradition do you practice, what tradition is from which we can say that we practice the sutras taught by the Buddhas in the early Buddhism, in the light of Mahayana, in the light of meditation, and that's the engaged Buddhism that we are practicing, I hope that I can help you a little bit and it can clarify a bit, Laurence, yes, it reassures me that I don't mix everything and that there are just categories so that we can understand.

Thank you, Laurence. Thank you, Sister Dinh Nghiê, Kathleen. Hi, dear sister and dear friend, this is Kathleen, I'm from Mainland China, now I stay with the Hong Kong Sangha, and thank you very much for sister's Dharma talk, I want to have a question, I'm a counsellor, and now I'm facing a lot of kind, they are facing a lot of suffering, especially they have a deep sense of shame, and that shame brings a lot of suffering to their life and their work, and I try to invite them to join our primary retreat and also support them to practice mind breathing and mind movement, but they told me that there's still, the shame will come to them, even in the midnight, daytime, and they feel a lot of suffering inside, and I want to ask for help, sister, would you have any suggestion to this kind of friend? I also shared with them Thay's talk about what sister said, they're facing transformation and liberation, but they told me that, I know that, but I couldn't change at daytime because the emotion is already so heavy and overwhelmed, and they could not find a way out, and yeah, and this the situation I found that my client is facing now, so I want to ask for help, yeah, from the Sangha, thank you sister.

They are my, I'm a counsellor, they are my kind, and also my friends are facing the same situation, yeah, they're very, yeah, they're very deep shame in their heart. I think that, I know some friends, or many friends, who come to Plum Village and who practice this exercise that helps them. Every evening, before going to bed, either we have shame or we have a negative feeling, we can just spend five minutes to sit still, and with a notebook, we will contemplate, and we just write down three things, maybe to start one thing, and then two things, and three things that we really, we are happy with this today, this today, what we have done, with what we have said, what we have thought of, that make us happy with ourselves, or that make us proud of ourselves, and then we write down.

So, we need something concrete, if we are happy with ourselves, or if we are proud of ourselves, we need something concrete, and it should be clear in our mind, and then we write down, and then when we write down, when we have some time to contemplate, and then we write down, it's in our mind, it's in our body, and then we go to bed, and it continues to, goes into our deep consciousness, and it stays with us, it continues to touch the seed, that seed of self confidence, of happiness in ourselves, instead of, instead of watching tv, or using our phone, or playing game, or something like that, we spend five minutes, just five minutes, not much, to recognize this positive, this beautiful things in ourselves, we write down, and then we go to bed, and even when we sleep, those three things will sink in our consciousness, touch the seed in our deep consciousness, and it continues to work in our deep consciousness, and if we do it every evening, every night, I'm sure that some change will happen.