2026-05-09
Chanting From The Heart - Sr Dinh Nghiêm - Mastering Anger

We've already done the Sutra, so the text is not too difficult on anger and mastering anger. And we've all studied anger, this Sutra, on the five ways of ending anger, and then in daily life, you practice how to master anger. But today, I would like to look into the questions that were asked by Denise.

How in everyday life can we play a role? How can we cultivate our true life, authenticity?

So, playing a role, for example, if we play the role of a mother, for example, how can we cultivate non-being, selflessness? If you are a mother, be clear that your children are in possession of yourself, they are your continuation. So your children, when they do something that disagrees with you, you don't see it as them, you see it as you. You're doing this because you've transmitted your genetics, your outlook, everything that you've said to them in conversation.

Since your children were babies, they have absorbed everything, all your conversations, your words, your way of being, your outlook, the way you behave. So children absorb everything that is you. But when they do something or say something that you don't dislike, you see that it comes from you.

It's not just them. And when you see this, you can see your own responsibility in their behavior. And so you don't get so mad at them.

It's what happens in our community. I see it that when I see my sister's doing something that is not within the practice, they're in an environment where they do this. It's because I have not been able to transmit to them everything that our Master has taught.

And there's also my part of responsibility in that. And I'm part of this environment that nourishes them. And as I say this, I ask myself, what will I say, what will I do to bring, to make this environment better for them? So I don't see them as being at fault.

I am part of the conditions. That makes people behave this way. Is that clear? It's like a co-responsibility.

Boudhism teaches us non-attachment. But when we have a cup of tea, is awakening elucidated? And if we try to make this vision, this awakening, is it attachment? So awakening is impermanent. And so it's important that we sometimes have a moment, a wow moment, a moment of awakening.

Wow, I understand. And then I continue my life and I don't think about it anymore. And I just behave as if, as if it was gone. As if I didn't understand anything. It was like a flash. And then I put it aside and I continue with other thoughts.

So this flash, this insight does not continue. It's like when scientists find the truth. Truth in science.

They find non-being, non-death. Like Lavoisier, another scientist. Nothing is gained, nothing is lost.

Everything is transformed. But scientists continue to suffer loss and death because they have this understanding that in saving life, they weren't able to maintain that insight. To behave with this truth.

So we continue to go back to this mindfulness to retrieve. Because understanding is not everything. Understanding and then that insight.

And for how long can we live with that insight? And if this awakening is maintained, we can speak about mindfulness and concentration. We need mindfulness and concentration over time, over a long time. So we maintain this insight.

We also practice non-attachment. Non-attachment. What I mean by that, if I'm attached to my insight and to my awakening, so this understanding and love, it's not there anymore.

I'll be angry. I'll be, you know, this profound vision, this understanding. So I will continue.

If I attach to that awakening state of understanding and love, and when I do no longer have that understanding, I suffer. Why do I no longer have that state? And that's attachment. That's attachment.

But if we want to transform suffering, then naturally we want to maintain that state of mindfulness, of concentration, and of understanding and love. Because if not, that would be attachment to suffering. And there is also that phenomena which is attachment to suffering, which suffering becomes a habit, and we get attached to that habit.

Even if we see that this family life, for example, is very violent, and it's a vicious circle, but we do not have the courage to do a step to leave that situation. I have seen some people attached to their suffering, and if you have people who are attached to their suffering, or more or less to their sangha, or to this path of practice, so between the attachment to suffering and attachment to practice, we can put these two on a balance, a scale, and see what causes more suffering and what causes less suffering. In this case, I am answering the question about if we cannot practice 100% of non-attachment, and if we still have a little bit of attachment, 30% or 40% of attachment, because if we no longer have any attachment, then we are already awakened.

So, everybody has more or less attachment. Attachment to what is positive, or attachment to negative, but we can choose, if we put that on a scale, which attachment helps us to suffer less. In that case, I choose that attachment.

I understand that question, because before we said, Sister Dinh Nghiêm is very attached to Thay, and Thay was laughing. It's much better to attach to that than to something that makes her suffer. If we are not a completely awakened being, we have more or less a few attachments, and therefore we can look at this in this way.

But it's good to be attached to awakening, because it says that we already have awakening in us. The problem is that we don't even have awakening to attach to. Sister Dinh Nghiêm, I'm sorry, can I have a sub-question?

I'm asking to myself, the Buddha who was human, I imagine that in reality he awakened, but he was probably not in a permanent state of awakening, because it appears to me to be impossible as a human being.

As a human being, is it not possible to be attached to anything? Is that what you're asking, that it's impossible for a human not to be attached? Yes, that's what I'm asking.

But in addition, the awakened state appears to me to be something completely an accomplishment, so perfect, so how to reconcile this with our human state, with the ideal of life, is that the Buddha? He reconciled the human state with awakening, and with a perfect understanding.

I'm going to ask the Buddha, I cannot answer that question, I can answer to that question with my own experience.

When I still have a few attachments here and there, and if I do not, I'm not able to completely detach myself, if I'm not able to transform all my attachments, therefore I look deeply at each attachment that I have, and if an attachment is causing suffering, therefore I have to transform this, but if other attachments, as a good environment that helps me to practice, to my sangha or my master, therefore I think a bit of attachment is helpful to help me stay in that path. But when this causes suffering or jealousy, therefore that attachment is not working, that attachment makes me suffer, and I transgress the limit. So right away I need to practice to transform, and since I have a lot of attachments, I look at each of them to find the one that makes me suffer the most to work on it, concretely.
I continue with the next question.

You say that we practice to help all beings and not for myself, but the first motivation usually is to meditate for myself, to be more calm, to deal with the situation. Once my internal situation is solved, then I can turn to the other.

Does that mean that I practice for myself and that helps me to be more available to everybody around me? So I say yes, the answer to that is yes. Is that in this way that there is no longer separation between me and the others? Yes. In the question we already see the answer.

Are the five skandhas illusory and non-permanent? Is the awakening an illusion? Yes.

And I would want to go more deeply into the last question, because somebody has also written me that she cannot, the last time after our gathering, she had a hard time seeing that five skandhas are illusory. That Thay's life was an illusion.

And when I'm reading or sharing, I would see that each of us have a definition of illusion. Each person has a perception, a feeling, an understanding of the word illusion. When we have a

hard time accepting that Thay's life was illusionary, I think that in that word illusionary, there was something pejorative about that word.

But if we understand illusionary as illusionary, therefore it's not fixed, it's not something that's unchanging. If you understand illusionary as something as non-self, impermanent, or something that changes continuously, then we see that Thay was non-self, Thay was changing, Thay was impermanent. And everything he has done also, and his teachings as well, his teachings changed because they've evolved with time, and will continue to evolve with time, so that they can stay appropriate to the situation of the present moment.

And Thay as well as non-self, and nothing is static to be Thay. And when we see the word illusionary, it's not pejorative, it's not sad. And if we look back, and we see that it's a great thing that Thay practiced in a way that not to be in the suffering of exile and war, Thay was able to leave all of that to be happy for many years and for the rest of his life.

And if we imagine if now that Thay is no longer here, and he has left nothing to his students of all his experiences of practice, and when we look back, the Vietnam War is no longer here, everything has changed, and Thay was drowning, if he would have been drowning in suffering in all his life, then we would have been very sad. And yes, the Vietnam War is no longer here, but it was also changing, illusionary. If things are illusionary, and we let ourselves be submerged by suffering of these things that change continuously, it would be unfortunate, would it not be.

That's why we practice so that we don't become drawn into suffering when things are changing, when things are illusionary, meaning impermanent and changing, and then the meaning of non-self, to have a true solid art. So, Denise, thank you Sister Dinh Nghiêm, to answer all my questions, it's much clearer for me now, and I find that, and it holds together, it links to everything else, and thank you so much. So we will continue with Mastering Anger of the Sutra of the Heart.

Thank you, Lily. Mastering Anger, so already the title, we have a lot to say. Mastering Anger is different than to suppress our anger, or to deny our anger, or to escape our anger.

Anger is there, we do not seek to eliminate, we simply practice to master it, to contain, so that it does not destroy, so that it does not kill or cause suffering, so it doesn't cause a lot of suffering to myself and to others.

I bow my head and touch the Earth
before the highest charioteer who trains humankind.
Stretch out your arms of compassion;
bring us to the shore of peace and solidity.
For so long, confusion has inhabited us
so that we have not had the chance to learn,
and we have often acted foolishly,
allowed seeds of anger and violence
to be watered in our deep consciousness.
Whenever seeds of irritation or fury
arise and operate in my mind,

they always cause wounds and resentment
in myself and in so many others.

So, we turn towards the Buddha, because we have confidence in him. We have studied history, and we know that the Buddha has managed to conquer anger, suffering, and afflictions.

He is able to transform suffering in himself, and help others do the same. It's really important to see the person who manages to do this, because otherwise we have the impression that what we're learning is only theory. It's just written in books, but we have a feeling that this is not realistic.

So, today there's so much anger in politics, in the world scene. There is so much anger, so much frustration, so much despair. And a lot of us feel and believe that we have a right to be angry, because the situation is so horrible, violent.

So, we feel we have the right to be angry. But when we look at our ancestors, when we know that during the Second World War, or during other wars, our ancestors faced the war with a lot of courage, with a lot of dignity and love. And it is because of them that we have confidence in humanity.

We can see that humanity can do this. Humans are able to face the most horrible atrocities with love and nonviolence. And anger is not the only response, because today young people believe that to show that I am opposed to something, to show that I want justice, I can show that I am engaged.

To show that I love something, I have to be angry. This is a common belief. A lot of people believe that anger is a way to show love and engagement.

And if I'm not angry, I'm indifferent. There's a lot of people who believe this now, and that feel that we have the right to be angry. We have a reason to be angry.

So, we speak about righteous anger. But happily, luckily, we have seen people in the past that have managed to face war, slaughter, cruelty, with nonviolence and love. And this is why here we evoke the Buddha, if you want to replace a dear Buddha by another name of somebody you know, in the first sentence of this sutra, I bow my head before somebody's name, somebody who acted with courage in a difficult situation.

Stretch out your arms of compassion;
bring us to the shore of peace and solidity.

And we have seen these people, they have managed to be at peace and to be solid in situations that were very difficult.

For so long, confusion has inhabited us
so that we have not had the chance to learn,
and we have often acted foolishly,

We did not want to destroy or cause suffering. It's just that we acted foolishly, and that we lived in ignorance. So we allowed seeds of anger and violence to be watered in our deep consciousness.

And these seeds of suffering manifest. Seeds of anger and violence, of irritation and fury arise in my mind, and they always cause wounds and resentment in myself and in others. And so this passage speaks.

I see many of you have studied consciousness, Buddhist psychology. So when we read this passage, you can see the image of consciousness, of mental formations, and our deep understanding. And as soon as in our store consciousness, these seeds are watered, and then they manifest, and they take up all the space in our relationships.

And when we think that the situation today, in this situation I have the right to be angry, and I allow myself to be angry, that I don't have to master it. I am, in this situation, watering anger and violence, and it becomes bigger and stronger, and it touches everybody in the family, my children, my brothers and sisters. And so if somebody does something I don't like, this anger will just take over very quickly.

And then we regret it afterwards, because it was just a little thing, just a word or something, and we could become like a volcano of anger. Because we believe that the situation in the moment authorizes me to be angry and express it. And if every day I water this seed of righteous anger, then the anger in me is very strong and huge, and always ready to explode into a situation, even when I don't need it, when it's not justified.

Listening to Avalokita's teaching,
I begin right now with a deep aspiration:
Whenever anger arises,
I shall come back to myself,
taking refuge in my mindful breathing and steps
so as to look after and embrace,
to protect and recognize
the painful mental formations in me.

And that's our practice, how to master our anger. First we have to recognize the anger, we should avoid closing our eyes, to distract ourselves, and to distract with consumption, with other things we need to recognize. Breathing in, I see that anger is rising in me.

Breathing out, I smile to it. It's an old friend that I have. This is a part of me.

I smile because I do not want to create another fight within me. A fight. Why am I angry? Or is asking, is this a just anger? I do not want to create another conflict or fight within me.

I do not want to force the fight to make violence. So that's why I recognize my anger, and with mindful breathing, and with mindfulness energy, I embrace it. Meaning that I look at it, I smile at it, and I take care of it, of that energy, with my mindful breathing.

And with a smile, and mindful breathing, I see that it cannot invade and submerge myself, and control me, and tell me what to do, dictate to me what to do. But on the contrary, with

mindfulness energy, I am master of myself, and I can master that anger. And you know calligraphy, I talked to you last time, of Thây's calligraphy books that a Hachette editor will publish this autumn.

So the editor has chosen about 90 of Thây's calligraphy in French. And Thây had anticipated everything, yet he had created multiple calligraphies in many languages like in French, in German, in Dutch, in other languages. And the Hachette editor has chosen 90 calligraphies in French.

And Thây has chosen two calligraphies in Vietnamese for a French speaking audience. And do you know which calligraphy is chosen in Vietnamese? It is *liên xoài tới xèn chói mạnh* Which means, in throwing a very narrow, very small thread, I link, I attach a tiger, a furious tiger. You know, I see a thread, silk thread, but I, when you break a branch of lotus, if you have a, below the flower of lotus there is a branch, and if you break it, take it apart, and if you split the other, and then you will see the little threads, white, very, very narrow, very fine, these little threads of silk, of lotus silk.

I throw them far, and I'm able to bind a furious tiger. And this little thread of silk, very, very fine, is our mindful breeding. When we breathe, when we stop, after a certain time our breathing is softer, and that breathing is mastering anger, calmed and to appease anger.

Now, everywhere you go, the doctor or the dentist, if you're completely tensed with fear or stressed, and the doctor or the dentist will always tell you, breathe, breathe deeply, breathe, because breathing regularizes the nervous system. Or the nerve, or the vagus nerve, I don't know how to say the vagus nerve in French, the vagus nerves. So the mindful breathing is extraordinary, it can be soft and very efficient, and it's the foundation of our life.

It is so powerful, and often we forget about it. When you make some exercises, today I shared with today's teaching, we were talking about the four foundations of well-being. We talked about exercises. When you make some sports or exercises, the breath is the foundation.

If you do well the exercise or well the sport, it depends a lot on breathing. It depends a lot on the way you breathe. Breathing is the foundation for sports people.

They know very well that breathing is the foundation. And the breathing is the foundation of life, of our life. And to regularize, harmonize our nervous system, our body, our mind, it's again breathing, it's always the breath.

And with her we can recognize anger, embrace it, and take care of it. And once we have calmed the anger, we can look deeply into it and its root cause. I'm going on with the text.

I shall remember to look deeply
to see the true nature and source of hatred and anger.
Heeding the Buddha's teachings,
I shall know how to guard my mind.
When anger arises in me
I shall not do or say anything
until I have mastered it.
I shall look deeply to see

the real nature of my pain.

So, sometimes with deep looking and with detail, if someone comes and says something and we discover its truth, and the truth is, reality is completely different than what we have thought and our perception and our belief, we have thrown us into anger.

In Thay's teaching, Thay often says of a story, of a true story, of his students. A couple had children, and amongst the children, a son. And the father was thinking that this boy was not his son, and was the son of somebody else.

And had this doubt, and had this belief, and with that belief, his behavior was different towards that son. And also towards his wife, for years. And one day, a member of the extended family came to visit, and when he saw that boy, and said how much your son resembles you, and the father was very surprised, and really asked to that family member.

And the truth was that he had doubts about, caused a lot of suffering within him to his wife and his son, and he didn't have any words for that son, believing that that son was the son of somebody else. And it's often that the cause of our anger doesn't have any foundation.

The cause of our anger is a false belief, a false information. That's why we have to look deeply, and we have to communicate deeply, communicate with the person that can help us, and in particular, with the person that we think is the cause of our suffering. We have to communicate, we have to search for, we have to be open to search for the truth. And not to be too sure about what we see, what we hear, what we think, what we believe.

Heeding the Buddha's teachings,
I shall know how to guard my mind.
When anger arises in me
I shall not do or say anything
until I have mastered it.
I shall look deeply to see
the real nature of my pain

We're not suppressing it, we're practicing how to take care of it. And when we don't manage to master our anger, we don't say anything, we don't do anything, because we know that if we say something or do something, it will be bad, it will be destructive. It will destroy love, it will destroy our relationship with the other person, and then we will regret it.

So it takes years to rebuild it and reconcile after that. So I shall not do or say anything until I have mastered it. I shall look deeply to see the real nature of my pain. Reading the text still.

The seed of ignorance
is the cause of my suffering,
and the reason why the seed of anger in me has grown so strong.
The person who makes me angry
has so much suffering himself, herself.

Such a person has had no chance to learn how to protect,

to come home to himself or herself to take care
and to transform the deep-seated habit energies within.

Contemplating in this way,
I will be able to bring about understanding and acceptance,
and help the other person
to practice and to transform the suffering within him or her.

The Blessed One has said,
When we are capable of conquering our anger,
we bring a double victory to ourself and to the other person.

I want to practice with all my heart
in order to respond to the Great Grâce.
May the Three Jewels give me energy and blessing
so that we can reach promptly the shore of peace and happiness.

So when we manage to master our anger, it is good for us and for others. If I don't manage to master anger, the anger in both myself and others will escalate. So when I master my anger, not only is it good for me, but it is also good for the other person as well.

You know, I remember in the years, in the 1980s, 1990s, when there were still few people, few sanghas, few people practicing throughout the world, the practice of meditation in the West was marginal, marginalized. It was not mainstream yet. Mindfulness meditation was not really known as, it wasn't known as it is today.

So only a few people were practicing. And I remember when I spoke and taught the practice, how to master anger, there were often a lot of reactions. Reactions like, yes, but in psychotherapy there are methods to relieve anger in expressing your anger, to ventilate.

So to punching a pillow or to punch an object, a punching bag, to let the energy of anger out. And Thay always had to explain that and he would say, no, in doing that, you are just watering the seeds of anger and that seed of anger will grow. It is not the right practice.

So when your anger is very strong and you come out of your room and your son says something and you could just punch your son like you punched your pillow and years go by and years go by. And I see that a lot of people practice mindfulness. There are lots of sanghas.

A lot of people are practicing in the world. And I have the feeling that a lot of people understand the practice and it is everywhere in local sanghas. And now with the way of the world is today, I have the feeling that we are going back to the 80s and 90s because anger is dominant.

And again, we are talking about righteous anger. You have the right to be angry. You should be angry.

And thankfully, thankfully, as I said at the beginning, our ancestors, some of our ancestors managed to cultivate loving kindness and compassion in the face of atrocities and war. And

so I have confidence and faith that as humans we have this capacity. And our master Thay went through three wars.

He experienced colonization, three wars in Vietnam. He was depressed. He has been through everything.

And he managed to follow the path of nonviolence, of compassion. And never, never his students, including myself, never have we heard him speak of people who went to war in his country. He never spoke of them with anger or hatred or violence or resentment.

Always his way of seeing things, his way of seeing things were reflected in his actions and in his speech. There was never violence or hatred towards people who made him suffer in his life. We still have 15 minutes.

And I would like to know if anybody has questions. I will listen. Thank you, sister.

Dr Sister, can you give me an advice as a grandmother? I have a four-year-old son or stepson. But I don't want to control him, but anger is often within him and I help him to breathe. But what other advice can you give me?

It's a very, very interesting subject for Dharma sharing. Will you have a Dharma sharing after this? Yes, yes. So therefore you can ask this question within the Dharma sharing room.

It's a very interesting subject. Why are there some kids that, babies, children who are born with some anger? So when we study consciousness or psychology or Buddhist psychology, we can see that within our deep consciousness there's all sorts of seeds. Yeah, there's small seeds, more or less small, more or less big or developed.

And we have received these seeds from our ancestors. And when we receive continuously from our environment, the parents that are close to us, when we grow up, we go to school. The school, the teachers, the friends, it's also an environment that's very close to us that seeds or sows the seeds or waters them.

So if we have, if your grandson already has a lot of anger, that's because he's received these seeds from his ancestors. And sometimes very far away ancestors, sometimes the very near ancestor, but these seeds are always there. It's the same thing.

The best is to embrace that energy, that anger energy, with your energy of mindfulness and love, the patience. And it's only that love that can, that energy of love, of patience and understanding that can embrace him and appease him. You have to avoid at all costs the screaming and use discipline, rigidity to contain, to stop that anger.

Because sometimes there are parents that, some parents say, even when I pretend to be angry and the child is afraid, it crisps. In that situation, that's oppression and oppression of the child's anger. And in that case, fear is added to the anger.

So not only is there anger, but there is fear. And therefore, as a parent or grandparent, we should, as much as possible, generate the energy of love, patience, to embrace and appease the energy of anger. In fact, to do that, she raises that child in the education of breathing and to free himself from that energy.

And can we go into the identification of the suffering, or do we stay in the energy that just burns and passes? It is sure that if she teaches her the breathing, that's wonderful. Yes, we were raised in the Dharma, so that's very good. And so mother and grandmother will breathe with him, but he's angry anyway, and he does that again.

And it's very hard for him because there is something within him, and he can feel the energy that perturbs him, and we don't dare go further with him. Do you know this seed has been there for a long time? It's been transmitted to him, so it's not within a few weeks or a few months that the study can transform it. You have to persevere, patience, and when we transform, when he will come to a state where he's going to be appeased, and that seed, all the family, all the lineage, grandparents, great-grandparents are transforming and making sure that it doesn't go down to another generation once more.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Pascal.

Thank you for your question.