

Winter Retreat 2018: Cultivating the Five Super Powers of Avalokiteshvara  
Dharma Post #7: Closing

Dear Thay,<sup>1</sup> dear brother Jerry, dear friends on the path,

**Following My Own Bodhisattva Path**

By now you might be wondering about this bodhisattva path. There have been many teachings and practices explored during our retreat time together. Some may seem abstract to you, or even difficult to grasp. “How can I remember them all?” The simple answer is, you don’t have to. The path itself, in its essence, is simple. Following that path, well, that is a different story. We find magnificent ways to tangle ourselves up!

As practitioners, we practice the Noble Eightfold Path, including Right Mindfulness, Concentration, Insight, Thinking, Effort, etc. On this path we learn to cultivate well-being and transform ill-being in ourselves, others, the world. No one and nothing is left out. But all the teachings of the Buddha, including the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, are merely guiding means to help us get free so that we can see and experience bare-naked reality, just as it is. The bodhisattva paramitas are skillful means to open up our hearts so we can see beyond our tiny selves into the non-self nature of all that is. The teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* encourage us, and can help give us confidence to face the partial truth of reality that is both uglier and more beautiful than we can sometimes bear. With focused attention and awareness, along with the support of others, we have a chance to see through that partial truth and realize something much deeper—that is the timeless, wordless ground of our being. Even when we refer to it as our true nature, or Buddha nature, we are just pointing a finger at the moon.

So, we study the teachings wisely. Thay has said<sup>2</sup> that when we study a sutra, we should always ask ourselves, “What connection is there between these wonderful teachings and my daily practice? How can I apply these teachings to my daily life in order to transform my suffering and liberate myself? To study a sutra is not just to enjoy its mysteriousness, but to shine its penetrating light on your own practice.”

In the same way, when we take in a teaching from one of our teachers, we don’t need to take it in with our intellect, comparing what is being taught with what we already know. If our attention is focused on the words and concepts, the dharma rain will not penetrate the “earth of your mind.” The teacher is trying her or his best to share from the earth of their mind what has been cultivated and realized. So what truly is being transmitted? Where did those insights come from?

“Allow the teacher’s words to enter deeply into your store consciousness, where they can touch the seeds of wisdom and compassion that are already there.” Whether studying a sutra, listening to a dharma talk, or reading a transcript, we should practice in this way. Take in the words mindfully and let them penetrate through your body and into the earth of your mind. Trust that any insight that arises

naturally will be just right. But be careful not to grasp at it or hold onto it, or else it is lost. With endless dharma doors opening us up, we have to let go of each individual door. Why? Because its true nature is essentially empty. Just be with what is, right now, right here, trusting that nothing is ever lost. That is the realized nature of interbeing—the inter-twining of the phenomenal and ultimate dimensions where we recognize that even “phenomenal” and “ultimate” are only concepts unless we realize them in this moment.

## **Key Teachings and Practices From this Winter Retreat**

Our dharma brother Jerry asked me to make an outline (he likes mind maps!) of the key teachings and practices of this retreat, and I thought it was a great idea. But in trying to recollect what was shared, I had difficulty. Such is the flowing, ever-changing nature of the phenomenal world. So, luckily, I have some written materials to go back to! Please realize that this exercise is merely an expedient means to help us re-collect, in one place, bits and pieces of useful teachings and tools—once again, only fingers pointing to the moon. If you find a practice or teaching that helps enliven or freshen your practice, it may be just the one for you. And then, things may change. So please practice wisely with all you have learned for yourself, and be open to where it takes you ☺

### **Messages from the Lotus Sutra**

#### **1. Every one of us can become a Buddha**

The primary message of the *Lotus Sutra* is inclusivity that leaves no one out. Buddha nature permeates the phenomenal and ultimate dimensions of reality, and we practice so that we may realize this deep truth.

#### **2. Discover what we never knew before**

Discovering what we never knew before means we approach each moment with an open mind, allowing reality to penetrate us and manifest with new, fresh realizations/ insights. We immerse ourselves fully in the flowing river of phenomena—impermanent, ever changing, never the same.

#### **3. Expedient devices**

In the second part of each dharma post we explored a variety of expedient devices that we can use creatively to help us deepen our practice:

- a. Touching the Earth: grounding ourselves in our body, allowing energy to move
- b. The Apparition of the Jeweled Stupa from the *Lotus Sutra*—historical encounters with the ultimate: touching the ultimate dimension with

mindfulness and concentration in our physical practices, including stopping and grounding

- c. Cultivating/ deepening/ sustaining our well of Happiness: practices of Right Effort and Diligence (the sixth element of the Noble Eightfold Path)
- d. The four types of Dharanis: reciting, chanting, embodying words, phrases or sounds (including some sutras) that have great spiritual energy. Here we encountered Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound and Plum Village chanting.
- e. Taking Refuge, dwelling in refuge, taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha in ourselves; meeting our shadow; and the practice of resting and healing. Here we encountered the parable of the Conjured City—a teaching about the need to rest along the bodhisattva path.
- f. The practices of Gratitude, Love and Devotion. Here we encountered the lives of Bodhisattva Seen With Joy By All Beings, as well as his manifestations in human form: Elly Hillesum, Thich Quang Duc and Nhat Chi Mai. One thing I realized after writing this post is that gratitude strengthens my love.

#### 4. The historical, ultimate and action dimensions

The interaction between the historical, ultimate and action dimensions permeated our winter retreat together. What were your realizations? How do you see them manifesting in your daily life?

### **The Five Super Powers of Avalokiteshvara**

#### 1. Look of Truth (*satya*)

Two kinds of truth:

- a. relative, worldly truth: birth and death, being and non-being, coming and going, etc.; the realm of form
- b. absolute truth: extinction of concepts and notions, the realm of emptiness

The relative and absolute truth of the Five Aggregates; penetrating the True Nature by following the Form

#### 2. Look of Purity (*visuddhi vimala*)

The *Sutra on the Land of Great Happiness*:  
Five Impurities and Five Purities

- a. Time and security
- b. Wrong and right views
- c. Unwholesome and wholesome mental formations
- d. Living beings and oneness of self & others
- e. Life span and limitless life span

The path of purification, the holy truth of well-being

### 3. Look of Great Wisdom (*mahaprajna*)

The six paramitas: giving/ generosity; the mindfulness trainings; all-embracing inclusiveness; right effort/ steadfastness in the practice; stopping, calming and looking deeply; wisdom and understanding

Interdependent co-arising and interbeing

The Great Mother: Prajnaparamita, Tathagatagarbha

### 4. Look of Compassion (*karuna*)

Birthing Compassion

Merit

Deep Aspiration and Great Compassion of Avalokiteshvara

### 5. Look of Good Will (*maitri*)

Sadaparibhuta: Never Disparaging Bodhisattva (Our Hero)

Goodwill and Inclusivity

Cultivating Good Will

## Closing Thoughts

What does it mean to practice the Five Super Powers of Avalokiteshvara? Practicing with the five powers or looks of Avalokiteshvara means getting real with ourselves—being honest about what is happening in the present moment. It means we open up more and more to the true nature of suffering and well-being. According to Thay, we need suffering to help us recognize the existing conditions of happiness. Awareness of suffering also helps us prevent the creation of wrong actions of body, speech and mind that can emerge from, and further water, negative seeds that will bring about more suffering in the endless cycle of birth and death (samsara).

Both suffering and well-being are concrete and can be experienced in the present moment. Thus we practice right here and now to deepen well-being; understand the

specific nature of suffering facing us; and create a fertile ground through our practice of mindfulness and concentration, where realization arises and guides us toward wholesome actions that have the power to transform suffering.

Thay's "40 Tenets of Plum Village Buddhism" say that both afflictions and enlightenment are organic in nature. Thus, "the practice needs to be constant in order for transformation to continue and for regression not to take place." In addition, "Samsara is a continuation, and the beautiful and wholesome things need to be continued for as long as possible, while the not beautiful and unwholesome need to be transformed so they do not continue. *The compost has to be used to nourish the flowers.*" Every breath, every step, every action taken in mindful awareness is a beautiful continuation that makes use of the compost. This is the essence of our practice—the practice encouraged and nourished by the energy of Great Compassion practiced by Avalokiteshvara. When we practice in this way we become the arms of the Buddha, manifesting the great heart of compassion that is the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara.

### **Part time Buddha/ Full time Buddha**

Sometime after I introduced the *Lotus Sutra* to our Buddha 501 class, one of our dharma brothers, Daniel Colbert, wrote a song about how we are part-time Buddhas who can also be a Buddha. Perhaps his words can inspire us all along the path of being a Buddha<sup>3</sup>:

I'm a Part-Time Buddha...Forgetful most of the time.  
I'm a Part-Time Buddha...How'd I get these two lines to rhyme?  
I'm a Part-Time Buddha...But sometimes, the light of awareness shines –  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine... I'm a Part-Time Buddha

She's a Part-Time Buddha...Her thoughts go round and round and round.  
She's a Part-Time Buddha...They may end up in the lost and found.  
She's a Part-Time Buddha...But she makes silence a wondrous sound –  
Oh, it's a wondrous sound! ... She's a Part-Time Buddha

We're all Part-Time Buddhas...Rushing in our busy-ness.  
We're all Part-Time Buddhas...Hurrying from one thing to the next.  
We're all Part-Time Buddhas...But when we stop and take a breath –  
We can all be – (you got it!)...Part-Time Buddhas

He was a Full-Time Buddha...Gautama's lamp was always on.  
He was a Full-Time Buddha...He shined it on everyone.  
He was a Full-Time Buddha...He taught how to radiate love like the sun –  
And how every one of us ... Can be a Buddha!  
How every single one of us ... Can be a Buddha!

As we practice with our own unique experiences, difficulties and insights, living each moment fully and completely, we are living into very our own spiritual path of

being a bodhisattva and a Buddha. The more we open up to it all, what Jon Kabat-Zinn called the “full catastrophe of living,” we find, as Korean Chan (Zen) master Dae Haeng taught, “the path becomes very wide and we can embrace everything as our practice—everything as sacred.” Then we can see how our part-time Buddhahood is actually a manifestation of the Full-Time Buddha!

May the spiritual energy of our practice together benefit all beings and bring peace.  
A deep bow of gratitude to all \_()\_

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<sup>1</sup> “Thay” is the affectionate term Thich Nhat Hanh’s student call him. The term means teacher.

<sup>2</sup> From Thay’s book, **Stepping Into Freedom**

<sup>3</sup> The recorded version of his song is attached to the email of this dharma post. If you aren’t able to access it, please let me know at [dsegormizo@yahoo.com](mailto:dsegormizo@yahoo.com) and I will see if we can help you ☺