

The Mahāyāna Practices for Healing, Reconciliation, and Peace

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First of all, I would like to express my deep appreciation to the Holy Father for helping Cuba and for offering a lesson of kindness to the American people and the world. I also would like to thank you, the Organizing Committee, for giving my assistants and me this opportunity to be with all of you. I strongly believe that this event will help nourish a lot of trust and friendship for many years to come.

Now, turning to the topic, allow me to share with you a few thoughts about the practice that my congregation and I apply at our temple in Hayward, California. In our practice, we treat each and every person as a member of our spiritual family. We cannot

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have happiness for ourselves when people around us are suffering. Therefore, we care for each other as much as we can.

This ideal guides us in our daily practices. We focus our practice on our activities of daily life, from the morning chanting in the Buddha Hall to the dinner table in the evening. We often go back to our breath and to the present moment in order to develop mindfulness. With mindfulness, we nourish loving kindness to monastic brothers and sisters in our temple, and to others in our community—men and women, boys and girls—as well as people on the streets.

Personally, I take this practice seriously and happily, and do so in unity with the **Plum Village** tradition of the Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh. To me, nothing is more wonderful than the smile we share with each other in the morning and throughout the day. I think no words can describe fully the happiness we receive and the peace we offer to one another through our care and regard for our community.

Furthermore, to assist my Buddhist community better, I take time to listen to the family problems with my Dharma friends when they come to me. Through these conversations, I understand them better and am able to suggest mindfulness practice for them to unlock misunderstandings and build trust in their family life. The same practice can start with loving kindness, compassion, and deep listening by all involved: spouses, parents, and children. With these practices, we can help family members realize together the root of their problems, and then try to resolve the conflicts, and rebuild happiness in their relationships.

Another way is to follow the Buddha's path of thought, speech, and action in the Eightfold Path. Persons begin with positive thinking about each other. Then they share a few kind words that

expand into a caring conversation. This can lead to actions that build the unity of the family. Finally, another method is called “flower watering.” First, one looks at a situation with an eye of compassion. From there, he or she tries to praise some good things that person does for his or her family. Any good counts, and any attempt to praise the person with an open heart will help.

Besides working with families, my main concern is always with the young. For many years I have worked with youth organizations to help young people recognize the value of life. As a refugee in America since 1975, I went through difficult years without any practical guidance or assistance. I wish I could have known more about mindfulness practice in the early years, so I could have developed my skills and helped people in a better way when I was younger. Youth need to understand the gift of life, the gift their life is to the world, and they need to give themselves as gifts to others with loving kindness and compassion. When this understanding becomes mutual among young people, they create a community that provides mutual support and affirmation. That is essential. Through programs based on mindfulness practice, from our “**Buddhist Youth**” to “**Wake Up School**,” our young members meet on the weekend to develop their compassion, loving kindness, and understanding for their spiritual life. They voluntarily receive and observe the five mindfulness trainings for guidance.

Looking at modern society, we recognize that there are many problems that teenagers and young people are facing in their daily lives. There is no doubt that without a way of practice these young adults will easily get into trouble, affecting not only themselves but also their families and society. Therefore to help youth grow in a healthy and happy way means to help our society attain more peace and happiness, to reduce violence and injustice, and to transform

discrimination into friendship and mutual respect for all. In this regard, we need to go beyond our community to help build a better society that, in turn, will benefit our community and all its members.

It is our purpose to bring Buddha’s teachings into daily life. In so doing, we move toward deeper concern and right efforts to build mutual respect among individuals, families, and communities. I do so by connecting these realities together as they are in “**Inter-being**.” By this I mean that individuals, families, and societies exist side-by-side. They are interconnected and need each other not only to survive, but to help each other grow and thrive. When I feel happy, my happiness can serve as an impulse to nourish happiness in my community and the society of which I am a part. I feel sad about the violence that occurred in Baltimore, Oakland, and Ferguson, because I know there is a lot of suffering happening in those parts of American society. I wish I could do something, no matter how small, to bring release and a little peace to those situations. But I can do something to bring peace to the situations in which I find myself in daily life. And now I can seek ways to participate in the broader society through this **dialogue of fraternity**.

Let me share with you a story about my driving experience. Many years ago while driving on I-880, I saw a billboard related to the work of the California Highway Patrol. It reads: “**Give ’em a break!**” In my opinion, the billboard was asking me as a citizen to drive safely to avoid accidents. Then, the officers can have more time to relax and less stress. I took that message seriously and I drive with mindfulness and compassion. Luckily, in more than thirty years of driving, I have never received a moving violation. The only tickets I have received, three in all, have been overtime

parking. If one of the parking meters could have practiced mindfulness, then I would have paid for only two because the machine was broken. But out of compassion, I volunteered to pay anyway as a donation to the city!

Finally, I believe that given Inter-being—the linkage between all beings—thinking often about the welfare and wellness of other people is one way to avoid conflict with others and at the same time bring harmony and friendship to life. There was a story about a man in Berkeley who for thirty-seven years worked tirelessly to keep the streets clean. In the beginning he started by himself. But after a few years, the neighbors saw the wonderful result and joined him. Now it has become a regular service program in the Bay Area.

In conclusion, I truly and humbly believe that we can make a difference by building better connections and healthier relationships between members of the society. Our working together in a dialogue of fraternity will take us in that direction and will bring more healing, reconciliation, peace, and happiness to the lives of all members of our communities and society as well.

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