

Introduction to Bodhisattvas and Bodhisattva Manjushri

Song: "Miracle" ~ Brian Kimmel

Homage to Thich Nhat Hanh: ~ Curt Hirsch

Dear Thay / Dear Community,

Welcome everyone to this year's annual retreat --"Love in Action: The Teachings and Practices of the Bohdhissatvas"-- here at the Ancient Yoga Center in Austin, Texas.

On this first evening of our gathering, April 26, 2019, we hereby dedicate this retreat and any and all merit earned by our practice and participation in this retreat to the life and legacy of our teacher-- Zen Master, Thich Nhat Hanh.

Thay led an extraordinarily engaged and active life, publishing over 100 books and being active in the peace movement, promoting nonviolent solutions to conflict. Nobel laureate Martin Luther King, Jr. nominated Thích Nhất Hạnh for the 1967 Nobel Peace Prize.

Thay created the Order of Interbeing (*Tiếp Hiện*) in 1966. He heads this monastic and lay group teaching the Five Mindfulness Trainings and the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings. The monastic order comprises 589 monastics in 9 monasteries worldwide.

In November 2014, Thay experienced a severe brain hemorrhage and was hospitalized. After many months of rehabilitation in France, San Francisco, and Thailand, on November 2018, Thay--now aged 92--has returned to Vietnam a final time to reside at his root temple, near Hue, to "live his remaining days". ¹

In reviewing his life one might be struck by the many names by which Thay was known:

Born as Nguyễn Xuân Bảo on October 11, 1926. The Vietnamese name *Thích* is from "Thích Ca" or "Thích Già", means "of the Shakya clan", which is the Buddha's family name. Thích Nhất Hạnh is often referred to as *Thầy* "master; teacher" or as *Thầy Nhất Hạnh* by his followers. His lineage name is Trùng Quang meaning "Clear, Reflective Light". Thay has translated his Dharma title as Nhất = One, and Hạnh = Action. ONE ACTION. Thích Nhất Hạnh's Dharma name is Phùng Xuân, meaning "Meeting Spring". In the Plum Village website, he is also referred to as Thiền Sư Nhất Hạnh "Zen Master Nhất Hạnh".²

Ironically perhaps, given the many names by which he is known--one of his most beloved poems is entitled *Please Call Me By My True Names*, a few lines from which we offer here, in

closing. Words of consolation, joy and hope which our teacher would surely urge us to remember, as he moves so gracefully and fearlessly towards his own Continuation Day:

“Please Call Me by My True Names:

Don’t say that I will depart tomorrow— even today I am still arriving.

Look deeply: every second I am arriving to be a bud on a Spring branch, to be a tiny bird, with still-fragile wings, learning to sing in my new nest, to be a caterpillar in the heart of a flower, to be a jewel hiding itself in a stone.

I still arrive, in order to laugh and to cry, to fear and to hope. The rhythm of my heart is the birth and death of all that is alive.”

May the rhythm of Thay’s heart and the deep resonance of his life be with us all in the coming hours and days of this retreat and beyond, as we continue to arrive, as we are always arriving, into the eternal timelessness of this One Present Moment.

Thank you, Thay. Thank you, Dear Community.

¹ Wikipedia contributors. (2019, May 20). Thích Nhất Hạnh. In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 23:00, May 22, 2019, from https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Th%C3%ADch_Nh%E1%BA%A5t_H%E1%BA%A1nh&oldid=897882660

² Dung, Thay Phap (2006). *"A Letter to Friends about our Lineage"* (PDF). PDF file on the Order of Interbeing website.

Dharma Talk~ Terry Cortés-Vega

Our teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, who we often refer to as Thay—which means teacher—offers us this guideline for attending a retreat. Thay says, **"Usually when we hear or read something new, we just compare it to our own ideas. If it is the same, we accept it and say that it is correct. If it is not, we say it is incorrect. In either case, we learn nothing."**

So to get the most benefit from this or any retreat, Thay says we must let go of our expectations and desires and judgements, and, as best we can, let whatever comes up, come up for us.

In this retreat we will study of the lives and teachings of the four most important Bodhisattvas in Mahayana Buddhism.

The word “Bodhisattva” comes from the Sanskrit word *bodhi*, which means “awakening” or “wake up” and *sattva*, which means “sentient being.” *Sattva* infers heroism and courage. So we can say that a bodhisattva is a person who is brave enough to do the work to wake up and heroic enough to help others wake up.

Bodhisattvas are lived examples--role models— of the perfect way to put the teachings of the Buddha into practice in our lives.

Bodhisattvas can be mythical or actual human beings. Often we don't know which they are—and it doesn't really make a difference.

Bodhisattvas are not gods. The Buddha taught that worshipping gods was not useful.

You and I are Bodhisattvas-in-Training. As part of our training we follow the ancient example of studying the teachings and also the lives of the teachers: the Buddha, our teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh and the Bodhisattvas.

Let's begin our study of the teachings and the lives of the Bodhisattvas Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, Samatanhadra and Ksitigatbha.

A training like this takes a lifetime.

We work with our own longing to make things easy for ourselves, but instead of holding onto our individual territory and defending it tooth and nail, we train ourselves to also open up to the world outside—a world filled with dirty dishes, irritating politicians, cranky partners, rude drivers and assorted other pains-in-the-neck.

As Bodhisattvas-in-Training, we are following in the footsteps of millions of Bodhisattvas, Buddhas, and great teachers. We are preserving the ancient tradition of concern, responsibility and openness that has been handed down from generation to generation.

All bodhisattvas teach just one thing: *prajnaparamita*. "*Prajna*" is a Sanskrit word that means "wisdom" but not wisdom in the usual sense. *Prajna* is the perfect wisdom of deep insight into the true nature of existence.

Thay explains paramita for us, "*Paramita* can be translated as 'perfection.' The Chinese character used for *paramita* means 'crossing over to the other shore.' To cross over, we have to *do* something, and that is called *paramita*. We return to ourselves and practice mindful breathing, looking at our suffering, anger, and depression, and smile. Doing this, we overcome our pain and cross over. We can practice 'perfection'—*paramita*— every day."

So we might say that *prajnaparamita* means perfected wise insight in action. It means, as Thay says, going from this shore to the other shore.

This shore that we're living on now is where we are anxious and worried and struggling— to fix others, to fix ourselves, to be appreciated. The other shore is a place where we would be open minded, open hearted, kind, patient—all the things we always wished we would be.

On this shore we see ourselves as separate from each other and each thing. On the other shore—the shore of *prajnaparamita* —we learn that all beings and all things are on this journey together. We are all interconnected. Interdependent. One.

We'll be looking into what our four Bodhisattvas have to say about that.

BK will introduce us to Manjushri, and later, to each of the Bodhisattvas, with one of his original songs that reflects the Bodhisattvas's life and teachings. Antonio will close our formal study of each Bodhisattva with an original Earth Touching that reflects the Bodhisattvas's life and teachings.

Bodhisattva Manjushri's song is called "Love's Garden". Enjoy.

Song: "Love's Garden" ~Brian Kimmel

Bodhisattva Manjushri was the Buddha's most revered disciple. Let's see who he is and how he teaches *prajnaparamita*.

Manjushri is depicted, in statues and paintings, as a beautiful 16-year-old boy. He really looks like a teenage boy: He has tattoos of flowers on the palms of his hands. He wears a necklace of tiger's teeth. He carries a flaming sword in his right hand. Not your everyday sword, but a flaming sword which he uses to transform ignorance into wisdom. In his left hand, by his heart, Manjushri holds the stem of a lotus; in the lotus flower is a scroll of the Prajnaparamita Sutras. Bodhisattva Manjushri rests on a lotus or he rides a lion.

Because he is forever young—he's the Peter Pan of the Bodhisattvas— he reminds us to stay in contact with the child within; to practice like a child with enthusiasm, optimism, curiosity and joy.

He inspires us to notice when our practice—when our lives!— are not fresh and fun....then to use our magic sword to sever those old habits of striving and struggling and taking things so seriously. Manjushri encourages us to sit on a lotus! Ride a lion! Tattoo our palms! He teaches that we learn better when we're having fun. So, he says, Smile. Laugh. Find ways to enjoy yourself. Your spiritual practice—your life— is richer and more useful to others when you are cheerful, when you practice effortless effort.

Our teacher is an example of Manjushri's instruction to stay young at heart. In addition to writing more than a hundred books, including books of songs and poetry and plays and children's books, Thay began to make calligraphy for us when he was in his 70s, and, in his 80s he re-wrote the five contemplations, the five mindfulness trainings and even the Heart Sutra. (And we—forgetting the child within— grumbled about the changes!) He is now 92 years old, paralyzed and unable to speak but requested to be taken to back Vietnam so he could continue his connection to the ancestors, support the work of the Vietnamese Buddhists and to remind us of our spiritual roots. He hosted a day's visit from nine U. S. Senators.

One of my favorite photos of Thay is when he is playing with bubbles.

This youthful attitude does not mean, of course, that the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh and Manjushri are superficial; in fact, joy and ease are profound teachings in themselves.

In addition to his eternal youthful enthusiasm, energy and joy, Manjushri is known for his extraordinary intelligence, a bodhisattva who can help us understand the Buddha's radical insight about the interconnected, interdependent nature of existence.

In our tradition we call Manjushri "The Bodhisattva of Great Understanding."

He teaches that the way we can best understand *prajnaparamita* is to actually live it in our ordinary daily actions and attitudes. To learn by doing.

He offers us a list of six Things to Do. We usually just refer to the list as the Six Paramitas but the word *prajna* is really important. If we only think of the list as six *paramitas* we might make them into a self-improvement plan, but if we keep in mind that these are six practices of *prajna*—insight that leads to the end of suffering— then we'll have some understanding of the importance of trying to put these practices into action.

Underlying each of the *prajnaparamitas* is the intention to act with openness and freshness; to experience each moment as completely unique and precious.

The first *prajnaparamita* is *dana* which means generosity.

We share our financial wealth and our emotional and mental wealth.

Sometimes our generosity is not *prajnaparamita* giving. For instance, if we offer a gift to curry approval or we donate money or do a favor for someone and then look for recognition or appreciation... that is generosity but it's not *prajnaparamita* generosity which is simply giving without any special purpose or attachment. It means rather than just living up to a code of

moral ethics or appearing to be benevolent, we give for the sake of giving. We give without expecting results such as appreciation, recognition, or a change in the actions of the receiver.

I've volunteered in jails for about 25 years, offering meditation, yoga and the teachings of the Buddha. Now other friends in the Sangha also volunteer and we see guys making big changes in their lives as a result of participating in the classes. But some of the fellows who have gone on to prison and after years have been released... have returned to jail. My hope has always been that our teachings will prevent recidivism.

Carlos taught me a big lesson. After two years in my jail classes and some more years in prison, he was released and then...he showed up in my class again. He saw my happy-to-see-you-but-disappointed face, and said, "It's ok Terry. It takes some of us longer than others."

With *prajnaparamita* generosity we give without expectation of results.

We give our money, our stuff. We give our full attention to the concerns and suffering of others. We look for ways to offer small kindnesses to ourselves, our family and friends and strangers. We are generous as consumers, living simply to help reduce the use of scarce resources.

Our teacher says: [Whatever we do to ease human suffering and create social justice can be considered practicing generosity.](#)

Milarepa was a 10th century Tibetan Buddhist yogi and poet who taught each of the six *prajnaparamitas* in a simple delightful way. This is a little surprising because as a teenager, he was quite aggressive. He even murdered a lot of people. But when he grew up he came to regret his violent ways and eventually became famous for his deep and beautiful practice.

For *dana prajnaparamita*,

Milarepa says:

For generosity, nothing to do,

Other than stop fixating on self. [BELL]

The second *prajnaparamita*, *sila*, means "discipline" or "noble conduct."

Discipline in the Buddhist context means slowing down enough and being present enough to be able to take care of ourselves and others. It means being open to whatever comes to us with curiosity, courage, understanding and love.

It means being mindful.

So we find teachings on “Noble Conduct” in the Five Mindfulness Trainings. They tell us how to take good care of ourselves, our kids, our friends, our partners, our crazy uncle. How to do well at work. How to make and keep relationships—friendly relationships, sexual, parental and so on. How to take care of the Earth. What to do about climate change....about so much media....about politicians. Margaritas. Marijuana.

Underlying prajnaparamita discipline is openness: open heart, open mind.

Later we'll meet the Bodhisattva Samatabhadra who will teach us more about the Five Mindfulness Trainings, but this little poem, which is based on a pebble meditation that Thay offers children, synthesizes the five Noble Conduct Mindfulness trainings:

May I offer to you a gift of five wonderful pebbles?

One of the pebbles protects your beautiful life and the lives of all other beings.

*Another pebble reminds you how happy you are when you are generous
with your time, your smiles and your “stuff.”*

One of the pebbles helps you rejoice in the divinity of your body and the bodies of others.

A fourth reminds you to cultivate deep listening and loving speech.

*The fifth pebble reminds you that you have enough
and you are enough*

and there is enough for everyone.

Milarepa:

For discipline, nothing to do,

Other than stop being dishonest. [BELL]

The third of the prajnaparamita practices is *shanti* which most teachers translate as “patience,” but our teacher calls “inclusiveness.”

Being inclusive does not mean putting up with fools or meanness or pain. It means having the intention to stay open to your thoughts, words and actions with curiosity and equanimity and patience. To be aware of your generosity and your stinginess; your kindness and your arrogance. To accept everything that arises as a teacher— including your disappointments, your frustrations, your pain. Your anger. Grief.

Thay says not to struggle against your unhappiness. Don't run from it. Don't hide from it. Don't even just “put up with” it. He says, “Embrace your suffering.” If we can remember to call on our patience and inclusivity, we will be more likely able to respond to what arises with a wise, compassionate mind.

So as we train in patience, we are first patient with ourselves. We learn to relax with the restlessness of our energy of anger, boredom, excitement. It is only then we can be patient with others.

Milarepa:

For patience, nothing to do,

Other than not fear what is ultimately true. [BELL]

The fourth prajnaparamita is *vidya* which means energy or enthusiastic effort.

Not struggling to be patient or disciplined. Not striving to be generous or to meditate.

Enthusiastic effort is also not an overly excited, hyper, cheerleader effort. Prajnaparamita effort means enjoying your practice. And helping others enjoy your practice.

If you are practicing because you feel obligated to or you are focused on the results that will come to you—Thay says you should consider changing how you are practicing.

With *vidya prajnaparamita*, like the forever young Manjushri, we practice diligently, continuously, and... joyfully.

When we begin to practice we naturally put a lot of energy and passion and joy into it. Later, after some time, our practice might start to feel tedious, stale. We might ask ourselves, “Why am I spending my time doing this?” Well, the goal of practice is not to get something; it is the opposite of ordinary ambition. The goal of our practice is to let go. “Letting go and not expecting anything” is the foundation for serenity....serenity leads to joy.... joy leads to enthusiasm... and in that way our Bodhisattva Journey becomes "effortless effort.”

Our teacher says, “[Mindfulness is the celebration of life in the present moment.](#)”

Something that happens only once in a lifetime is a very special occasion—and everything happens only once in a life time—so when you see a star, pull a weed, cook rice, hear sad news, have a headache, smile, put on hold with annoying music—each of these is an opportunity to “celebrate life in the present moment.”

Milarepa:

For effort, nothing to do,

Other than practice continuously. [BELL]

The fifth prajnaparamita is dyana which means meditation.

You can meditate every day of your life but if you do it without awareness, openness and concentration you might just as well be checking your facebook pages.

Even if you buy the nice meditation outfit with the matching zafu and zabuton.... and you fix up a very pretty altar with incense and flowers and a statue of the Buddha.... and you buy a little expensive bell and inviter...If you're sitting there making lists, or replaying a conversation or worrying about what might happen--your mind will be distracted, that's what we notice when we meditate—but if you just sit there and let it be distracted instead of noticing and gently bringing it back, then your meditation will be just another empty act.

The first aspect of *prajnaparamita* meditation is getting still; we aspire to establish a stable position and find balance, flexibility, and ease. Within this effortless effort our whole body, mind and breath harmonize. There's no grasping for, no aversion to whatever comes and goes. We're not caught by anything.

It's not so easy. It may take years of practice, although I've heard that some people can do it right away.

The second aspect of prajnaparamita meditation is looking deeply— to receive fear or anger if they appear, to accept pain or restlessness.... or pride—without being attached to it. To come to understand your own thoughts and words and actions as well as coming to understand the things others say and do.

And of course in meditation we have painful legs and backs, our feet go to sleep and so forth.

They talked about how he meditates at a retreat for the U.S. Congress in 2011:

When I practice sitting meditation, I do not open the doors of the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the body, or the mind, and yet I feel very alive. I feel cozy. I practice breathing in mindfully and I touch the fact that I am alive. I touch the miracle of life within me. I enjoy breathing in and breathing out.

A 14th century Japanese Zen teacher describes how he meditates:

*“Abandoning myself to breathing out
and letting breathing in naturally still me.*

All that is left is an empty cushion

under the vast sky,

the weight of a flame.”

And....Milarepa

For meditative stability, nothing to do,

Other than rest in presence. [BELL]

The sixth *paramita* is *prajna* itself, the wisdom of a mind that has direct experience of interdependence, of interconnection. With prajnaparamita we don't rely on ideas and concepts—including scientific and mathematical ones—because they are too small to contain the truth of the reality and mystery of life that is prajnaparamita.

We can express *prajna* is like this: The right hand is correct and the left hand is wrong. The right hand is good and left hand is bad. The right hand is love and the left hand is hate. Then you put the two palms together and bow. This gesture of respect and reconciliation is the truth of oneness, of prajna.

We bow to our teachers, we bow to each other, we bow to our cushion, we bow to cats and dogs and scorpions. We bow to trees and weeds. To oceans, storms and stars. And in those moments, everything is prajna...everything is One.

Of course we can also bow without bringing our palms together; it depends on our attitude.

So even though in our day-to-day life we experience a world of *separate* entities, with *prajña* we realize there is no separation. *Prajña* knows the interconnectedness—the interdependence, the Oneness—of all things. Some folks, including the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara who we'll later—call prajnaparamita, “emptiness.” Our teacher calls it “interbeing.”

This is the way the poet Anne Alexander Bigham describes it in her poem, “It is Enough.”

“To know that the atoms

of my body

will remain

To think of them rising

through the roots of a great oak

to live in

leaves, branches, twigs

perhaps to feed the

crimson peony

the blue iris

the broccoli.

Or rest on water

*freeze and thaw
with the seasons.
Some atoms might become a
bit of fluff on the wing
of a chickadee
to feel the breeze
know the support of air.
And some might drift
up and up into space
stardust returning from
whence it came.
It is enough to know that
as long as there is a universe
I am a part of it.”*

And...

Milarepa

For wisdom, nothing to do,

Other than know directly how things are. [BELL]

Sometimes we long for our old habits.

When we work with generosity, we become aware of wanting to hold on.

When we work with discipline we see our resistance to having guidelines.

When we work with inclusivity, we see our craving for wanting to pick and choose.

When we work with patience, we notice our longing for speed.

When we practice with enthusiastic effort we observe our laziness.

When we meditate, we see our endless restlessness.

But because of prajnaparamita, these practices become the means for transforming our old established habits and finding ease.

They says: [Prajnaparamita is like the wings of the bird that can carry it anywhere.](#)

You and I have little moments when we experience *prajna*—our mind is open, at ease, joyful; we experience each moment as completely unique and precious.

We could live like this, with such wisdom.

That is the prajnaparamita teaching of Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of Great Understanding. Our work is to cherish and nurture this perfect wisdom that lives within us.

Touching the Earth~ Antonio Brunner

We'll end our formal study of the life and teachings of the Bodhisattva Manjushri by Touching the Earth. When we touch the Earth, also known as prostration, we let go of the idea that we are separate; we remind ourselves that we are the Earth and part of Life. To begin this practice, you will be invited to stand and join your palms in front of your chest forming a lotus bud. If you like, after the sound of the bell, you might touch your forehead—your thoughts—then your lips—your words—then your heart—your actions.

Then you have two choices.

You may remain standing as you bow your head or you may gently lower yourself to the ground so that all four limbs and your forehead are resting comfortably on the floor like the “child’s pose” in yoga. You place your palms down, connecting with Mother Earth, take a deep breath, then turn your palms face up, showing your openness to the Three Jewels — the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. When we touch the Earth, we breathe in all the strength and stability of the Earth, and breathe out our suffering – our feelings of anger, hatred, fear, inadequacy and grief.

[BELL]

Please rise.

Invoking the Bodhisattva Manjushri, I bow deeply or touch the earth with gratitude.

[BELL]

I release all of my restlessness, my anger and my boredom...

all of my resentment, doubt and fear....

all of my my euphoria, excitement and attachment....

all of my disappointment, frustration and pain.

I release all of my suffering and the causes of my suffering....

and I open my heart now to receive from Mother Earth her healing energy.

Dear Mother, with your energy, please help me to transform my suffering and become a Bodhisattva Manjushri.

I hereby proclaim that I am ready to recognize and fully own the seeds of the Bodhisattva Manjushri within me.

I acknowledge that in order to make way for those attributes to grow,
I hereby now acknowledge my desire to own the traits of Manjushri that are already in me and
to diligently water those seeds within me.

I hereby water those seeds by vowing to look into the heart of things and into the hearts of
people instead of getting caught by what people say and do.

To touch my open-heartedness that lives evergreen within me, and that allows me to see the
world with non-discriminative, non-judgmental, and

non-reactive eyes, so that I can become more balanced and observant of what is actually
going on rather than getting caught by what I perceive.

I hereby claim my inner sword of understanding, and vow to cut through the bonds of my own
wrong views thereby freeing myself from my own self-inflicted imprisonment.

I clearly recognize that within me lives a child that is already an expert at being enthusiastic,
optimistic, curious and joyful. I recognize that within me lives a perpetual beginner's mind that
is fresh and fun that doesn't stay too serious or struggles for too long. Dear inner child with
your beginner's mind, please don't stop inviting me play. I promise, when you do, I will.

I surrender myself into the universal energies of happiness, courage and inclusiveness.

No more running. No more tolerating. I say, yes to embracing. Yes to understanding. Yes to
letting go.

With effortless effort, I hereby harmonize my breath and equilibrate my body. With an intention
for reconciliation, I now unite all of my wrongs and all of my rights so that I can claim my
freedom right where I am.

[BELL]

Please rise and then be seated for a few moments of silent reflection.

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May our study of the lives and teachings of the Bodhisattvas, including Bodhisattva Manjushri
who teaches us to live joyfully, practicing the Six Prajanaparamitas
benefit us which of course includes our teacher and all beings.

[BELL BELL]