

Tenet 20: "A real Arahata is also a Bodhisattva, and a real Bodhisattva is also an Arahata."

Teaching by Thầy Pháp Lưu

1. Context of the Teaching

Winter Rains Retreat at Deer Park

- Given during the Winter Rains Retreat at Deer Park Monastery.
- Emphasis on living and practising in community after the isolation of the pandemic.
- Joy at seeing many young practitioners building Sangha together.
- Retreat life as a real-time laboratory for transformation.

Thầy's Lifelong Aspiration

- Thầy's deep aspiration: to build community as the ground of awakening.
- After exile from Vietnam, he studied how communities live physically and relationally.
- Founded the School of Youth for Social Service with Sister Chân Không in the 1960s; young people lived together and served rural communities.
- Community building is not organisational; it is spiritual practice.

2. Brotherhood and Sisterhood as the Highest Value

- "There is nothing higher than brotherhood and sisterhood."
- If our Buddhist practice damages siblinghood, something is off in our understanding.
- Living together reveals irritation, projection and preference.
- The training:
 - Look at each other with fresh eyes.
 - Do not solidify perceptions.
 - Recognise that perceptions are partial and often wrong.
- Seeing that behaviour arises from suffering gives rise to compassion.

Community is the ground where non-self becomes lived reality.

3. The Forty Tenets: Purpose and Spirit

- Given by Thầy in 2006–2007 after examining historical Buddhist schools.
- Question: What does Plum Village contribute to 2,600 years of Buddhist tradition?
- Not new doctrine; deep looking into tradition.
- Prevents:
 - Dogmatism
 - Complacency
 - Mechanical practice
- Invitation to renew direct experience of joy and freedom.

4. The Term "Arahata"

4.1 Historical Meaning

In early Buddhism, an Arahata is:

- One who has cut off afflictions
- One worthy of offerings

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Summary Notes: A real Arahāt is also a Bodhisattva, and a real Bodhisattva is also an Arahāt

- One no longer subject to rebirth
- Destroyer of afflictions
- Destroyer of the enemy (greed, hatred, delusion)

4.2 Worthy of Offerings

- Monastics live from generosity.
- Offerings are made to the Sangha in the ten directions, not to individuals.
- No ownership; only stewardship.

Practice implications:

- Care for robes and requisites without attachment.
- Ask before taking what is not given.
- Stewardship instead of possession.

Deeper dimension:

- Not taking what is not given includes:
 - Attention
 - Affection
 - Recognition
- Grasping creates imbalance.
- Worthiness arises when there is no attachment to receiving.

4.3 Tathāgata and Non-Self

- Tathāgata means “thus come” or “thus gone”; just as it is.
- The Buddha cannot be found in:
 - Body
 - Feelings
 - Perceptions
 - Mental formations
 - Consciousness
- No separate, graspable self.

The Arahāt sees through self-view.

4.4 No Longer Subject to Rebirth

Not about a soul escaping rebirth.

It means:

- Freedom from attachment to self-identity.
- Freedom from psychological rebirth into anger, fear and craving.
- Birth and death are manifestations of conditions.

Insight of transformation:

- Nothing is created from nothing.
- Nothing is destroyed into nothing.

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- Only continuation and transformation.

Rebirth is the rebirth of affliction when conditions are fed.

4.5 Destroyer of Afflictions

Afflictions:

- Anger
- Despair
- Jealousy
- Wrong perceptions

They are obstacles to freedom.

The Arahant:

- Does not suppress afflictions.
- Removes their nourishment.
- Like fire deprived of fuel, the flames cease.

5. The Three Powers

5.1 The Power of Cutting Off

- Cutting off attachment.
- Letting go of grasping at pleasant feelings or identities.
- Not recreating past happiness through effort and control.

5.2 The Power of Love

- Loving the easy and the difficult.
- Especially practising with those who irritate or challenge us.
- Moving beyond punishment and retribution.

5.3 The Power of Understanding

- Seeing causes and conditions in others.
- Recognising ancestry, culture, and conditioning.
- Practising non-discrimination.

Understanding supports love.

Love and cutting off weaken afflictions.

Together, these powers allow us to touch nirvana.

6. Mindfulness of Thought

Key teaching:

- Thoughts are not neutral.
- Every thought has tone and direction.

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- Repeated negative thinking waters seeds of anger and despair.

Practice:

- Catch thoughts early.
- Transform irritation into appreciation.
- Do not allow a small spark to become a bonfire.

The Noble Path leads to well-being.

The ignoble path feeds suffering.

7. Historical Tension: Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna

Later development:

- Mahāyāna = "Great Vehicle"; ideal of the Bodhisattva.
- Hīnayāna = "Lesser Vehicle"; sometimes used pejoratively.

In some Mahāyāna texts:

- Arahāt portrayed as seeking personal liberation only.
- Bodhisattva portrayed as delaying nirvana to save all beings.

Early meaning of Bodhisattva:

- "One leaning towards enlightenment."
- Used by the Buddha to refer to himself before awakening.

Over time:

- Bodhisattva path became central in Mahāyāna.
- Hierarchy developed between Arahāt and Bodhisattva ideals.

8. Radical Nature of the 20th Tenet

"A real Arahāt is also a Bodhisattva."

"A real Bodhisattva is also an Arahāt."

This collapses the hierarchy.

Key insights:

- Personal liberation and collective liberation are not two.
- Deep personal freedom benefits all beings.
- Service without inner freedom becomes entangled in ego.
- True awakening naturally expresses as compassion.

The Hīnayāna is in the Mahāyāna.

The Mahāyāna is in the Hīnayāna.

9. The Power of Presence

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Thầy's vision:

- Each centre has an elder practitioner who:
 - Holds no administrative power.
 - Seeks no recognition.
 - Simply abides.
- Presence itself transforms the environment.

This shows:

- Awakening does not require visible role or prestige.
- Doing nothing can benefit many.
- Being is already service.

10. Intention and Sincerity in Practice

Questions for reflection:

- Why am I practising?
- For recognition?
- For status?
- For approval?
- For belonging?

Human needs are natural.

Practice means:

- Seeing motivations clearly.
- Not letting unconscious longing drive the path.
- Letting go of spiritual ambition.

Attainment does not guarantee happiness.

Dwelling happily in the present moment is the core.

11. Practical Application in Retreat Life

During retreat:

- Practise fresh perception daily.
- Share suffering without blame.
- Circulate difficult emotions skilfully.
- Notice afflictions early.
- Cultivate the three powers.
- Release comparison and ambition.
- Value presence over role.

The real test of this Tenet is:

- In the kitchen.
- In the dormitory.
- In the meditation hall.

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- In moments of irritation.

12. Core Integration

A real Arahāt:

- Has cut off afflictions.
- Is free from grasping.
- Naturally benefits all beings.

A real Bodhisattva:

- Serves all beings.
- Has cut through self-view.
- Is not caught in affliction.

There is:

- Nowhere to go.
- Nothing to attain.
- Only the continuous practice of dwelling happily in the present moment for the well-being of all.

To be a real Arahāt is to embody freedom.

To be a real Bodhisattva is to embody compassion.

In reality, these are not two.