

## Summary Notes to Class 4 on Plum Village Tenet 4: Nirvana Is Nirvana: There Does Not Need to Be a Nirvana With Residue or Without Residue

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### 00:00–02:15 | Introduction & Setting

- **The class begins** with a welcome: “Dear Thay, dear sisters, dear brothers, welcome to our fourth class on the 40 tenets.” The 40 tenets classes on youtube are based on a book written by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh called “Làng Mai nhìn núi Thử u” or “Plum Village Looks at Vulture’s Peak” The book describes the essential characteristics of Plum Village practice and teachings. For an English list of the tenets themselves, follow this link: <https://orderofinterbeing.org/2016/07/forty-tenets-of-plum-village/>
  - **The monastic** who is teaching this first class is a young, white male in his thirties. His name is Thay Phap Luu and he is speaking from Ocean of Peace Meditation Hall, Deer Park Monastery in the US. He is wearing brown robes, has a shaved head, and has a gentle disposition and smile.
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### 02:15–06:45 | Suffering and Identification

- **We suffer because** we identify with feelings and the body: “We think that when we have a painful feeling, that feeling is *me*.” When we are sick it feels as if there is no peace. All we are learning here is to become free of our suffering- freedom comes from understanding our suffering. Seeing our feelings as conditioned phenomena allows us to be more detached from them.
  - **Buddhist practice encourages** recognising that feelings are conditioned phenomena: “They are manifesting just like a rainbow manifests with the right conditions of water vapor and the sun.” Our feelings have conditions.
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### 06:45–09:00 | The Nature of Attachment – Upādāna

- **Last class** we learned about *Upādāna* means *grasping* or *fuel*: “It is like the fire of our afflictions sticking to our body, our feelings.” We have a tendency as humans to stick to our ideas and notions.
  - **The five skandhas** are described as fuel for afflictions: “The flame is dependent on the fuel... that is the meaning of upādāna.” The fire is “sticking” to the fuel.
  - **In the early texts Buddha** used the phrase *Upādāna Skanda*. The term nirvana means “extinction” where there is no more fuel for manifesting conditions of suffering.
  - **Our practice is to stop “sticking”** to our feelings, perceptions etc. as much as we can.
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### 09:00–14:30 | Clinging to Pleasant Memories & Loss

- **The mind clings to memories** of past happiness: “We try to recreate the conditions of happiness that existed in the past.”
- **This leads to disappointment**: The family meet and argue with each other... it is not the wonderful memory we imagined.
- **Thay said**: “Our biggest obstacle to happiness is our idea to happiness.”

If we can let go of expectations of happiness we can find happiness much more easily. To touch Nirvana. Letting go is a continuous practice of releasing ourselves from unhelpful expectations.

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### 14:30–18:30 | The Phantom Limb Metaphor

- **Neuroscience: Phantom limb syndrome.** Often the missing hand is in a tightly clenched fist and it can take years to release that clenching fist. A doctor used a mirror to teach the brain that the missing hand isn't clenched. "Within us there's a kind of hand and it is always grasping."
- **Letting go is the way to healing:** "We practice releasing that phantom limb within us... that is grasping at our body."

Letting go of *stickiness* or *grasping* of 5 Skandas:

Body  
Feelings  
Perceptions  
Mental Formations  
Consciousness

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### 18:30–23:00 | Breathing and Letting Go

*Breathing in, I let go of the past*

*Breathing out, I know I am breathing out*

Bell.

- **The breath cannot be grasped:** "No matter how hard you try to grasp onto it, you cannot take it."
- **Breathing meditation teaches release:** "The breathing meditation is a way to train ourselves to practice letting go." In the beginning you can get caught in trying to control your breathing. We are used to controlling whatever we put our attention to.
- **Buddhism teaches us** to observe what is going on within us and around us and let go of trying to control and manipulate. Then we have less fear because we see our body is just a conditioned set of millions of phenomena. A wonderful manifestation. Without ideas of self you continue to breathe and live. We die but we don't disappear.
- "When I think about my "self" I am depressed!" – Ajan Sumedu, monk. He means he gets stuck in ideas that lead to suffering.
- **Letting go** is about removing delusion. Avid-aya. Knowing things as they are + negative = ignorance or delusion. Delusions give rise to afflictions (Klesa)

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### 23:00–26:00 | Afflictions vs. Sin

- **Buddhist ethics** focuses on afflictions (klesha), not sin: "Anger is not evil, it is an affliction. We need to understand its roots." Afflictions like anger make the present moment unpleasant. We need to understand the anger and not treat it as something evil- we want to understand its roots and conditions that feed it.
  - **Practice removes the causes**, it doesn't smother the symptoms: "We don't repress it... we remove the fuel."
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## 26:00–35:00 | Tenet #4: Nirvana is Nirvana

- **Introduction of the fourth tenet:** “Nirvana is nirvana. It does not need to be nirvana with residue or without residue.” (residue = 5 skandas). This point of view in Buddhism has led to a lot of misunderstanding. When Buddha died, they say he is completely Nirvana-ised. Nirvana is only absence of delusion and afflictions- it’s not death.
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## 35:00–43:00 | Four Types of Nirvana in Scholastic Buddhism

- **Master Xuanzang** lived in the 7th century (602–664) and travelled from China to bring back missing sutras from India. He was gone for 20 years and wrote about his journey. He gave us a detailed view of India at the time. He went to Vulture’s Peak and studied with a great master and came back to China. He was given a team of young monks and scholars to translate Sanskrit texts and summarise these texts- teaching of the Manifestation Only School.

**Xuanzang’s list of 4 kinds of Nirvana includes:**

1. **Nirvana that is pure in nature**
  2. **Nirvana with residue**
  3. **Nirvana without residue**
  4. **Nirvana of no abode**
- **Phap Luu cautions:** “We start to treat nirvana as a conditioned phenomenon.” Plum Village thinks it is a waste of energy categorising Nirvana. Therefore, the Plum Village insight is Tenet 4, a response to the classical categories. *Nirvana is Nirvana*. They see the attachment of our ancestors to definitions. The obstacle of affliction but also the obstacle of knowledge!
  - **Appreciating wonders of life here and now** gives us the conditions of happiness. By learning to live together in harmony, walking meditations, mindful eating etc. we practice being in the here and now.
  - **Piaget child psychologist** saw that young children are amazed when you hide something. At a certain age they recognise that the pen hasn’t disappeared because they can’t see it. It’s called “The conservation of matter”
  - **Many of us have a belief framework of what should be;** a conceptual (mis)understanding of cause and effect. “I studied hard so I should get a good job.” All kinds of assumptions around everything that “should be”. That thinking of what is right and wrong or should be is a veil that obscures our vision.

We are so caught up in what “should be” in our belief system that we cannot see things as they are. Practice touching “suchness” – Tatatha. The itness of things. The suchness of things. Tathātā is a Buddhist term variously translated as “thusness” or “suchness”, referring to the nature of reality free from conceptual elaborations.

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## 43:00–50:00 | The Raft Metaphor & Letting Go of Dharma

- **Buddha’s metaphor:** my teachings are like a raft: “When we reach the other shore, we let go of the raft.” Do not get attached to the tenets as permanent truths. We need to let go of dharma too at the right times, to avoid being dogmatic. It is too heavy to carry the raft everywhere. He can make another raft at the next river.
- **Even Dharma** must be released: Let go of the Dharma. The dharma is like a raft. Let go, even more so of wrong teachings.

- **A misunderstanding** of the raft metaphor leads to abandoning practice prematurely.
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#### 50:00–56:00 | Modern Delusions and Wrong Teachings

- **Consumer culture** encourages clinging: “Advertising, websites are constantly reinforcing beliefs that are the wrong teaching.” They promise happiness through buying stuff, aspiring to be something or someone.
  - **We can learn but be careful.** Don’t water seeds of desire, jealousy etc. We train ourselves to be aware- to see delusive ideas. We look at the moon, not the finger pointing at the moon.
  - **Engaged Buddhism means** seeing things as they are in order to help others and touch true compassion. This is the deep practice of awakening, the way of the Bodhisatva.
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#### 56:00–01:01:00 | How can we describe Nirvana?

- **Nirvana is described by the Buddha in Udāna 8.3:** “There is, O monks, the not born, the not arisen/produced, the not made, the not conditioned. If there were no unborn, unmade, unproduced, unmade, unconditioned, then you would find no escape here from the born, the produced, the made, the conditioned. But as there is the unborn, the unproduced, the unmade, the unconditioned, that is why you can find escape from the the born, the produced, the made, the conditioned.”
  - **In order to describe the unconditioned** we describe the stripping away of conditions- but that leads to the idea that Buddhism is a negation of the historical dimension. That’s why Thay’s tenet addresses this.
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#### 01:01:00–01:10:00 | Not Nihilism: Nirvana Is Liberation

- **The speaker warns** against equating nirvana with annihilation: “That is a wrong understanding... Nirvana is the absence of delusion and the afflictions.”
  - **True nirvana** is freedom within life, not rejection of it: “It is the freeing of life.”
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#### 01:10:00–01:13:00 | Next Tenet Preview & Closing

- **Preview of the fifth tenet:** “It is possible to touch nirvana in the present moment.”
  - **The session ends with the sound of the bell:** “Enjoy just being present with our body without any attachment, without any grasping.”
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