

## Summary Notes Class 5: Plum Village App channel on youtube.

### Tenet 5: It Is Possible to Touch Nirvana in the Present Moment

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#### Teaching the Dharma and the Buddha's Awakening

- **The tenets are based on a book called "Plum Village Looks at Vulture's Peak"** written by Thay. The book describes the essential characteristics of Plum Village practice and teachings. The tenets outline our *mindfulness practice*. In this class, Brother Phap Luu shares about the fifth tenet: "It is possible to touch nirvāṇa in the present moment."
- **15.15. Thay Phap Luu begins within reflections on teaching Dharma.**  
<https://www.youtube.com/live/qzWyG8IDdKQ?si=fip5BV1ku6hgmBhf>
- **Look backing we visualise** the Buddha sitting under the Bodhi tree, decided to sit until he woke up to the Nature of things. His aim was not external- noone knew he was doing it at the time. He had disappeared from his life. *Sometimes we forget that Buddha was a human being*. He suffered and had doubts- but something made him continue, a spark of joy and life that he has transmitted to us as our spiritual ancestor. Jesus, Mohammed, Moses, a trial leader, a community leader; all of those are teachers who have in some way let go of their ego.
- **Old Kadampa Tibetan Buddhism have a saying:** "Imagine you are at the end of your life in a dark cave, its cold and wet and noone knows you are there." That as the place to start your practice. Helpful idea.
- **We aim for this expectation of a happy death.** Let go of that idea. Every moment we are dying, and things do not go according to our hopes. We are separated from loved ones as they die. We have troubles. Thay Phap Dung likes to use a phrase. "You have your expectations? Lower them!" then whatever comes is like a gift from the universe. The Buddha lowered his expectations, he was homeless, living in the forest, but in him he was touching something he called Nirvana. [24:30].
- **The Buddha's** determination to awaken under the Bodhi tree was driven not by fame or power but by a profound desire to understand the nature of things. He faced doubt and loneliness but persistently pursued joy and awakening in each moment [02:00].

#### The concept of Nirvana

- **Nirvana is described as the extinction of desire** or afflictions, symbolized by a flame going out when it runs out of fuel [26:00]. When afflictions arise, our practice helps us to not be attached to them. Nirvana is when the flame of desire and afflictions go out. Buddha saw that what we consume through our senses is the fuel for our afflictions. We do not stop perceiving but we stop grasping. We remove the fuel not the senses.
- **We are learning about Nirvana** the unconditioned and its nature. The teaching of our teacher, Thay. We don't need to talk about different types of Nirvana- there is no smell, or sign. The relationship between the Sign (the word Nirvana) and the Nature of things is not the same.
- **There is a great happiness:** We can touch Nirvana in the present moment! That is good because the present moment is all we have! Come back to your body and breathing and let go of all ideas of Nirvana. Let go of your questions. Thinking isn't necessary for breathing. There is still feeling – I am aware of the contact with the floor, the air, my body. But don't grasp at any feelings, don't stick to a feeling pleasant or unpleasant- gently direct attention back to the breathing. Be with the wondrous existence of this present moment! [49:00]. With continuous practice it becomes easier and deeper afflictions and suffering have the chance to surface and be handled with care. Just be with it.
- **We can change conditions** that allow e.g. anger to take hold of us –right diligence doesn't deny the existence of the anger but rather invites the anger to be watered with the seeds of mindfulness. We always

do this individually and collectively. External factors will always come and provoke anger to manifest, but we learn to not grasp onto the perception of other people's perceptions about us. If you can do that Nirvana is easy to touch! But we are social beings and it is hard. (Bell)

- **Meditation Postures.** There is a Sharaputra meditation where you stand up. Plum Village we can do it sitting, walking, lying down.
- **We can visualise Buddha** sitting under the tree. He has had a glimpse of Nirvana. He sees he continues to get stuck in memories, yearning for past happiness, and he trains himself to stop grasping for that. The more he goes into himself the more he understands the nature of his mind. We come to Plum Village and we look for help to do this – to walk the talk and feel more joy and peace.
- **We are human and affected by everything we consume.** We try to not see things as good or bad but we try and see how we relate to those things. We don't try and live in a vacuum chamber and deny existence of life. Instead we help each other as a sangha. We recognise our good seeds we all have. Some have better conditions to nurture those seeds in the level of the historical dimension. 39:00 Nirvana is not the deleting of the five skandas. Nirvana is fleeting – it's not permanent- it's a cessation of anger, but we still have the seed of anger.
- **When someone treats us badly** it is a litmus test for where we are at with our practice. Can we allow ourselves to suffer because of (their) unskillfulness?

*"It is very difficult to touch Nirvana if someone is strangling you" – (48:27)*

It's not impossible but it is very difficult! We need basic things, basic conditions, a safe and stable environment to practice touching Nirvana. Food, water, temperature. We are on Mother Earth that has an iron core and makes a magnetic sphere and a thin layer of atmosphere that protects us. It is wondrous. We do have conditions and we recognise that but do we need to be liked? We are social beings, one of the most painful things a human being can experience is to be cut off and extricated from community.

- **The monastery is a refuge or cradle for practitioners** and it must be a safe place for those who come here. We have to be diligent and practice the precepts well. I should not have to worry about the behavior of others if they are following the precepts. It is easy to lose our practice when we leave the monastery where others are not practicing the precepts because the conditions are different. As we become more solid in our practice we can put our practice to the test. It is easy to get carried away by the collective energy of those who are not practicing.
- **As novices and aspirants we still have habits** and we can feel indignant at how the others are practicing, or talk to us as Novices- and we may be right, but that is the best time to practice. How we respond to that provocation shows us where our practice is at. Can we let go of the perception and let go of our suffering and just be with it even if you are screaming inside! Letting go not suppression: can we show compassion to those who have incorrect or unskillful perceptions of us? Do not suppress but learn how to practice "letting go" the idea of ourselves, and the concept that's been imposed on us. Stop feeding that mental formation. As soon as let go, we smile, we become a teacher, we become a part-time Buddha. Just be with your suffering...when it is too much practice appropriate attention.
- **There is no intrinsic quality or characteristic in Nirvana**, and it's beyond any sign or word used to describe it [34:00].
- **Nirvana is not a permanent cessation** of the five skandhas, but a cessation of *delusions* and *afflictions* which can manifest and cease intermittently [52:00]. It is easier to touch Nirvana when the conditions are right and we are not in pain but it is not impossible.

### Practicing Mindfulness and Appropriate Attention

- **Bringing attention to the breath** allows one to remain in the present moment, letting go of distracting thoughts and perceptions without grasping onto them [40:30]. Breath in and out and notice feeling,

contact with floor, parts of body. Being aware of discomfort (or illness etc.) can be difficult, but don't grasp at sticking to that awareness. Gently direct back to breathing and be with the wondrous existence of this moment.

- **Not acknowledging anything around you is NOT nirvana**- using our intelligence to look at phenomena is the practice. We look deeply into the historical to see that Nirvana is already there just like the water and the wave. (Vertical relationship versus the horizontal relationship of waves) Nirvana is not a phenomenon but the true nature of all phenomenon. (51:00)
- **Right diligence** involves recognizing and letting unwholesome mental formations go back down, preventing them from *manifesting* [53:30]. We invite the afflictions to "go back down".
- **Appropriate Attention (*manaskāra*)** is a universal mental formation always present with consciousness; controlling attention is key to managing thoughts and emotions [55:00]. When it is too much for you, you can have the practice of "appropriate attention"- (and don't torture yourself.) Attention is *Manaskara* and *Yoniso* (58:25) is appropriate. *Manas-kara* is a skill, it literally means Mind-Act. The action of directing your mind. You can shift your attention to insight.
- ***Manaskara* or Attention is one of the universal mental formations** and precedes a thought. As soon as consciousness is there, there is attention. So we feel like we have no control on our thoughts but we do. It depends on what we are consuming from the collective consciousness. Media, conversations. If we can not get stuck to what others think about us its far easier to touch Nirvana!
- **The technique of "changing the peg"** or "changing the playlist" helps shift attention from negative to positive mental formations [01:06:00]. We do this when it gets too much. Even focussing too much on dharma can create fodder for delusion and psychosis- like the fibres on the sugar cane. Inviting wholesome mental formations like joy, mindfulness, and concentration strengthens positive seeds in consciousness [01:07:30] in both our mind consciousness and our store consciousness.
- **Every thought has a "fragrance"** – a tone that leads somewhere. Vassana can strengthen or weaken the seeds of our consciousness. Self criticism, anger, disappointment, etc. It can make us vulnerable to what other people say, when all along we have been watering the seeds of anger. The way out is in. We are the fuel to those afflictions. Not feeding the fire is not suppressing the existence of unfairness and injustice.

### Relationship Between Individual and Collective Consciousness

- **Human beings share a collective consciousness** analogous to a community of ants communicating through pheromones, influencing individual thoughts and behaviors [56:30]. We are all like ants in the historical dimension! Ants act communally, they have a collective consciousness too. If we are not careful we can get carried away by reinforcement from media, news, books, film, music, etc. They penetrate our consciousness and what we think of as our "selves" is just an aggregate of what we have consumed. The world before Internet feels like the world before a dream. Its changing the way we think and do things.
- **Media, social networks, and collective influences** shape our attention and perceptions, making appropriate attention critical to avoid being carried away [01:03:00].

### Challenges in Practice and Community Life

- **Practitioners face challenges** in maintaining joy and peace when interacting with others, especially in conflicts and misunderstandings, which test the solidity of their practice [52:30].
- **Letting go of the self-image and perceptions** imposed by others is crucial to reduce suffering and touch Nirvana in daily interactions [01:11:30].
- **The monastery offers a supportive environment** (refuge) where precepts help create safety, but monks and nuns must also stand firm when leading retreats or engaging with the world [01:00:00].

### Use of Metaphors to Understand Dharma

- **Dharma teachings** are likened to sugarcane: practitioners should extract the sweetness (understanding) and discard the fibrous words to avoid getting stuck [01:14:00].
- **The teaching method** encourages using teachings as tools to touch Nirvana and then letting go of attachment to the teachings themselves [01:14:30].

### Importance of Practicing Continuously and Patiently

- **Awakening is gradual** and requires continuous practice, appropriate attention, and patience, recognizing that progress involves ups and downs and learning to be with suffering [01:10:00].
- **Even subtle thoughts have a fragrance (vāsanā)** that nourishes seeds in consciousness, influencing the presence of afflictions [01:05:00].

### Summary

- **It is always possible to touch Nirvana** in the present moment through mindful attention and removing grasping, which is a cause for great joy [48:45].
- **Practitioners are encouraged** not to waste life doubting their ability to touch Nirvana now [01:15:00].

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**Note:** Timestamps are estimates, the same lecture is on both the Deer Park and Plum Village app channels on youtube with different timestamps.