

Touching the Buddha Within

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The Heart of the Buddha's Teachings p. 250

In 1968, I was in India with Samdech Maha Ghosananda, a leader of Cambodian Buddhism, and Sister Chân Không, my dear student, friend, and colleague. For several days we sat together on Vulture Peak until sunset, and I realized that in former times the Buddha had looked at the same setting sun with the same eyes. Afterwards, we walked down the mountain slowly and mindfully, not saying a word, and since that day, I have continued to walk in the same way.

Vulture Peak is beautiful, and Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, North and South America are also beautiful. When there is mist on the mountains, it is beautiful, and when there is no mist, it is also beautiful. All four seasons are beautiful. You are beautiful, and your friends are beautiful. There is nothing to stop you from being in touch with life in the present moment. The question is, *Do you have eyes that can see the sunset, feet that can touch the earth?* If the Buddha were to transmit his eyes to you, would you know how to use them? Don't think that happiness will be possible only when conditions around you become perfect. Happiness lies in your own heart. You only need to practice mindful breathing for a few seconds and you'll be happy right away. Confucius said, "What greater joy can there be than putting into practice what you have learned?"

Sometimes we feel as though we are drowning in the ocean of suffering, carrying the burden of all social injustice of all times. The Buddha said, "When a wise person suffers, she asks herself, 'What can I do to be free from this suffering? Who can help me? What have I done to free myself from this suffering?' But when a foolish person suffers, she asks herself, 'Who has wronged me? How can I show others that I am the victim of wrong doing? How can I punish those who have caused my suffering?' " Why is it that others who have been exposed to the same conditions do not seem to suffer as much as we do? You might like to write down the first set of questions and read them every time you are caught in your suffering.

Of course, you have the right to suffer, but as a practitioner, you do not have the right not to practice. We all need to be understood and loved, but the practice is not merely to expect understanding and love. It is to practice understanding and love. Please don't complain when no one seems to love or understand you: Make the effort to understand and love them better. If someone has betrayed you, ask why. If you feel that the responsibility lies entirely with them, look more deeply. Perhaps you have watered the seed of betrayal in her. Perhaps you have lived in a way that has encouraged her to withdraw. We are all co-responsible, and if you hold onto the attitude of blame, the situation will only get worse. If you can learn how to water the seed of loyalty in her, that seed may flower again. Look deeply into the nature of your suffering so you will know what to do and what not to do to restore the relationship. Apply your mindfulness, concentration and insight, and you will know what nourishes you and what nourishes her. Practice the First Noble Truth, identifying your suffering; the Second Noble Truth, seeing its sources; and the Third and Fourth Noble Truths, finding ways to transform your suffering and realize peace. The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path are not theories. They are ways of action.

We begin the practice by seeking meaning for our life. We know that we don't want to run after fame, money, or sensual pleasure, and so we learn the art of mindful living. In time, we develop some understanding and compassion, and we find that these are the energies we can use to alleviate our suffering and the suffering of others. This already gives some meaning to our life.

We continue the practice, looking deeply into the Five Aggregates that comprise the self and we touch the reality of no-birth and no-death that is in us and in everything. This touching brings us the greatest relief. It removes all of our fears, offers us true freedom, and gives real meaning to our life.

We need places where we can go to sit, breathe quietly, and look and listen deeply. When we have difficulties at home, we need a room like that where we can take refuge. We also need parks and other

peaceful places where we can practice walking meditation alone and with others. Educators, architects, artists, legislators, businessmen - all of us have to come together to create spaces where we can practice peace, harmony, joy, and deep looking.

There is so much violence in our schools. Parents, teachers, and students need to work together to transform the violence. Schools are not just places for transmitting technical know-how. They must also be places where children can learn to be happy, loving, and understanding, where teachers nourish their students with their own insights and happiness. We also need places in hospitals where family members, health care workers, patients, and others can sit, breathe, and calm themselves. We need City Halls where responsible people can look deeply into local problems. We need Congress to be a place where our real problems are truly addressed. If you are an educator, a parent, a teacher, an architect, a health care worker, a politician, or a writer, please help us create the kinds of institutions we need for our collective awakening. Our legislators need to know how to calm themselves and communicate well. They need to know how to listen and look deeply and to use loving speech. If we elect unhappy people who don't have the capacity to make their own families happy, how can we expect them to make our city or our nation happy? Don't vote for someone just because he or she is handsome or has a lovely voice. We are entrusting the fate of our city, our nation, and our lives to such people. We have to act responsibly. We need to create communities of deep looking, deep sharing, and real harmony. We need to be able to make the best kinds of decisions together. We need peace, within and without.

The heart of the Buddha is in each of us. When we are mindful, the Buddha is there. I know a four-year-old boy who, whenever he is upset, stops what he is doing, breathes mindfully, and tells his mommy and daddy, "I am touching the Buddha within." We need to take care of the healthy seeds that are in us by watering them every day through the practice of mindful breathing, mindful walking, mindfully doing everything. We need to touch the Buddha within us. We need to enter our own heart, which means to enter the heart of the Buddha. To enter the heart of the Buddha means to be present for ourselves, our suffering, our joys, and for many others. To enter the heart of the Buddha means to touch the world of no-birth and no-death, the world where water and wave are one.

When we begin the practice, we bring our suffering and our habit energies with us, not just those of twenty or thirty years, but the habit energies of all our ancestors. Through the practice of mindful living, we learn new habits. Walking, we know that we are walking. Standing, we know that we are standing. Sitting, we know that we are sitting. Practicing this way, we slowly undo our old habits and develop the new habit of dwelling deeply and happily in the present moment. With mindfulness in us, we can smile a smile that proves our transformation.

The heart of the Buddha has been touched by our being wonderfully together. Please practice as an individual, a family, a city, a nation, and a world wide community. Please take good care of the happiness of everyone around you. Enjoy your breathing, your smiling, your shining the light of mindfulness on each thing you do. Please practice transformation at the base through deep looking and deep touching. The teachings of the Buddha on transformation and healing are very deep. They are not theoretical. They can be practiced every day. Please practice them and realize them. I am confident that you can do it.