

# Thich Nhat Hanh

## Transformation and healing

### *Thirteenth Exercise- Observing the Desiring Mind*

*When his mind is desiring, the practitioner is aware, 'My mind is desiring.'*  
*When his mind is not desiring, he is aware, 'My mind is not desiring.'*

Desire means to be caught in unwholesome longing. Form, sound, smell, taste, and touch are the objects of the five kinds of sense desire, which are desire for **money, sex, fame, good food, and sleep**. These five categories of desire produce obstacles on the path of practice as well as many kinds of physical and mental suffering. Whenever the practitioner's mind and thoughts turn to desiring, he or she immediately gives rise to awareness of the presence of that mind.

"This is a mind longing for wealth.

This is a mind of sexual desire.

This is a mind desiring reputation.

This is the root of the arising of a mind longing for wealth.

This is the feeling of pain caused by sexual desire.

"The *Satipatthana Sutta* teaches that when desiring is not present, the practitioner also needs to observe that it is not present.

We can practice like this:

"At this time, the mind desiring wealth is not present;

at this time, sexual desire is not present;

at this time, the mind desiring reputation is not present; etc.

This is the root of the absence of the desire for wealth.

This is the root of the absence of the mind desiring reputation, etc.

This is the sense of ease which accompanies the absence of the mind desiring riches.

This is the sense of ease which accompanies the absence of a mind desiring reputation 'etc.'

The Buddha often said that many people confuse desire with happiness.

In the *Magandiya Sutra (MaJjhimaNikaya 75)*, he gave as an example a man who was forced to live in the forest because he had leprosy, suffering from severe itching and stinging. He dug a hole, filled it with dry branches and logs, and set them on fire. When the fire became red-hot charcoal, he stood at the edge of the hole and stretched out his arms and legs over it to enjoy the heat. When he did this, his suffering was relieved. On days when he could not make a charcoal fire to warm himself, his itching was unbearable. Miraculously some years later, he was cured of the disease and went back to live in the village.

One day he went into the forest and saw a number of lepers dragging their bodies to warm themselves by a charcoal fire, and he felt tremendous pity for them. The charcoal was extremely hot, he could not go near it. If someone had dragged him to the hole and warmed his body over

the charcoals, his suffering would have been great. That which in former times had brought him happiness and relief, was now a source of agony.

The Buddha said, "Desire is also just a hole of burning charcoal in the forest. Only those who are sick look on desire as happiness.

" Before he became a monk, the Buddha had tasted a life of trying to satisfy the five desires, so his words came from experience. True happiness, he said, is a life with few desires, few possessions, and the time to enjoy the many wonders in us and around us.

The scriptures record how the monk Baddhiya tasted happiness and ease when he observed his life of no desire.

'One night while sitting in meditation at the foot of a tree in the Bamboo Forest Monastery, Baddhiya suddenly called out twice the words, "O happiness!"

" The next morning, another bhikkhu reported this to the Buddha, thinking that the monk Baddhiya regretted losing the high position he had had when he was a governor. That afternoon after the Dharma talk, the Buddha summoned Baddhiya and asked,

"Is it true that yesterday during your meditation you called out twice, 'O happiness!'?"

" Baddhiya replied, "Venerable Sir, it is true that last night I called out twice, 'O happiness!"

"Why?" the Buddha asked him.

"Please tell the community."

Baddhiya replied, "Venerable Sir, when I was a governor, I lived in luxury and had great power and influence. Wherever I went, a regiment of soldiers assisted me. My residence was guarded day and night, inside and out, by soldiers. In spite of this, I was always anxious, afraid, and insecure. Now as a bhikkhu, I go into the forest on my own, sit alone at the foot of a tree, sleep alone without a curtain or a mat, and I never have any feelings of unease or fear. I feel a great sense of ease, joy, and peace that I never felt when I was a governor. I do not fear assassins or thieves, because I have nothing to be stolen or fought over. I live at ease like a deer in the forest. During last night's meditation, I felt clearly that feeling of ease, and that is why I raised my voice and called out twice 'O happiness.' If I disturbed any of my fellow practitioners, I sincerely apologize, Venerable Sir."

The Buddha praised the monk Baddhiya and said to the community, "The monk Baddhiya is making steady and stable progress on the path of contentment and fearlessness. His are the feelings of joy even the gods long for. "In the Vijnanavada school, "desirelessness," the absence of longing for something, is classified as one of the eleven wholesome mental formations. Desirelessness was the basic condition which made possible the feelings of joy, peace, and ease which the monk Baddhiya realized while living the simple life. Simplicity is to have few desires and to be content with just a few possessions. Desirelessness is the basis of true happiness, because in true happiness there must be the elements of peace, joy, and ease.