

DOM – Saturday, January 17th, 2026
Chanting of the Heart
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Transcription of Sr Dinh Nghiêm Dharma talk
The Middle Way. The 12 links

So, for those who are here for the first time, I would like to give you a bit of history. We have a chanting book in French and in Vietnamese, and in these two versions of the chanting books, the chants are, the book is divided by days of the week, so it's Monday night, Tuesday night, Monday morning, etc. We don't, excuse me, I'm having trouble, we don't have the same organisation in the English translation, so since Thay was a novice, the first day he became a novice, the chanting books that he used are the monks and nuns.

There are only two chants. Every day, the monks and nuns chanted the same thing in the morning and every day. Some people in the temple, the novices, the aspirants, another chant in the afternoon.

And the songs were composed of many chants, and in the afternoon, it's like a ceremonial chant for the hungry ghosts. In 1996-97, Thay created a chanting book with all sorts of sutras that he had chosen, and that way, every day we can sing a different sutra. And these were the important sutras that Thay chose.

First of all, he made it in Vietnamese, and the chanting book was then translated into English, but not exactly the same. The English chanting book, there's a list of sutras, there's a list of ceremonies, but the layout is not the same as what Thay had proposed in Vietnamese. And when we translated it into French, we kept exactly the same format as the Vietnamese.

And so last year, we started the first day on Monday morning, and we ended the year with Wednesday's chant of Wednesday morning. So please know that the order of the sutra is not very important in the chanting book, except the first one. The first one is the Diamond Sutra, and Thay chose that as the first one because Thay said that our tradition is the Zen tradition, the meditation, and the Diamond Sutra is the most important sutra.

It's symbolic, it's fundamental in the Zen tradition, in the meditation tradition. I prefer using the word meditation or dhyana in Sanskrit, because in Occident, when we use the word Zen, we think of the Japanese Zen tradition. I hope the translation in Chinese is working well, because I just noticed a Chinese message, but as I can't read it, I'm just wondering how that's going.

It's going well. I can hear it on my computer, it says, Okay, let's continue. Sister Hexuan, or Huang, if anything is not going well, just make a sign.

So there we are. Now you understand why we are speaking about the Sutra of the Middle Way. And the last time, we thought that we had finished the Sutra, but thinking about the New Year, I told myself, I have to explain a little more about the interdependent colourizing.

So, towards the end of the Sutra, if we don't study with more time and attention, we could misunderstand easily, have misunderstandings. So the Sutra started with Right View, and the Buddha explains Right View, that the extremes of being and not being, it's very clear. So he explains that clearly at the beginning of the Sutra, and at the end of the Sutra, the Buddha explains also, he elaborates a little more, the 12 links.

So we understand the signification of Right View, but despite studying and understanding, some people don't understand properly. They will say things like, I will take the Middle Way, in context that I'm compromising. And that's not true.

The Middle Way is not compromising. We don't add the two and divide. It's not an average.

And we take the middle. For example, I want to start the Day of Mindfulness at 7 o'clock. And other people want to start at 8 o'clock.

Okay, so let's take the Middle Way. We'll start at 7.30. And that's a false way. That's a misunderstanding of the Middle Way.

The Middle Way does not mean that we add the two and divide by two. If we add the two and divide the two, that's moderation. If we want to use the word.

We're taking half, you take half, it's a compromise. Or something like that. But the Middle Way is not that.

The Middle Way is that we transcend. We transcend being, not being, birth and death. We transcend all notions of extremes, of opposites.

Coming, going, one, many, birth and death. So that has to be clearly aligned. And so in the second part of the Sutra, the Buddha speaks of the 12 links.

The 12 links of co-arising. Co-arising interdependence. Emmanuel, can you show the little drawing that I sent you? There are the 12 links that start with ignorance.

In the second part of the Sutra, the Buddha said, When we are attached to being, it's an extreme view. It's a false view. When we are attached to non-being, it's another falsehood.

Each of these two are extremes. So the Way, the Middle Way, says that this is because that is. This is born because that is born.

Ignorance. So from ignorance, there is impulse. And from impulse, there is consciousness.

Because there is consciousness, there is psychosoma. Because there is mind-body psychosoma, there are the six sense organs. Because there are the six senses, there is contact.

And because there is contact, there is feelings. And from feelings, there is craving. And from craving, there is grasping.

And because there is grasping, there is birth. There is death. There is old age, death, grief, and sorrow.

And this is how this entire mass of suffering arises. Can you please make it bigger so that we can see it? I can see that this presentation can bring a lot of misunderstandings because if we don't study it deeply, it's a linear explanation. From one, there is another, through another.

So I'll explain each word to you. Ignorance. From ignorance, there is impulse.

We've seen this in many sutras. So it's a phenomenon. Dharma, with a small d. So it's a formation.

We have physical, psychological, anger can be an impulse. Other translations, there's another word they use. That they use is impulse.

So we can also use formation. So depending on the translation, you'll get impulses or formations. So when we have anger, it's an impulse that disturbs us and brings suffering.

So those two are both used. You can use formation as well. So from that phenomenon, there is consciousness.

And because there's consciousness, there's psychosoma. Mind, psych, nothing to say with psychology. Our mind.

And psoma is the physical body. Thank you. I'm going to switch translations.

And so you see, when you see these 12 links, can everybody hear me? So you can see very clearly the causes of our birth. The circle of samsara. Because we're not yet awakened.

We're still ignorant. We have this consciousness. And we are born with a sixth sense organ.

And we have this body. And when we have this body, we have contact and we have these sensations. And we try to grasp.

To obtain. And that's how the circle of the cycle of birth and death continues. Continues continuously.

And these sensations. That lead us to believe in this way. And when we think in this way.

It doesn't go well. We study probably that we have to transcend. We have to liberate ourselves.

Of our notions of being and non-being. And this presentation. Can lead to misunderstandings.

Because it will lead to a cell. And that remains in this cycle of samsara. You know that before.

The awakening of the Buddha. In India. There were a lot of spiritual.

Traditions that were well established. And there was this notion of reincarnation. The cycle of samsara.

Well before the Buddha. In this representation. If we are not very careful.

We can think of the cycle of samsara. So and that's completely against the teachings of the Buddha. And the Buddha taught us.

That everything that goes against the non-being. Impermanence of the nirvana. That's not taught by the Buddha.

And for those of you. If you studied. If you studied Buddhist psychology.

You studied consciousness. You know that in our deep consciousness. We have the manas.

It is profoundly made in us. This notion of being. Of self.

We are attached. To the cell. To these links.

And these links of interdependence. These ways of thinking. Our consciousness.

And our psychosoma. It is there in the circle of samsara. And it continues with reincarnation.

And we studied. We know that everything. Interests.

We studied the four noble truths. We know that the first noble truth. Is that there is suffering.

And it interests with the causes. Of suffering. And also with the cessation.

Of the causes of suffering. And then it interests with. Eight.

Noble eightfold path. So the eight elements of the eightfold path. They inter are.

In concentration there is mindfulness. In the right view there is mindfulness. There is everything.

In one there is everything else. And that is the same with these 12 links. So you have to see that.

Ignorance. There is everything. Formation.

Psychosoma. Sense organ. Sensation.

Ignorance will feed attachment. Ignorance will feed formation. Ignorance will feed all other elements.

And these other elements. Will feed. Ignorance.

Formation will be. Attachment will feed ignorance. And we will redo this.

In a circle. And there is. Between these 12 links.

And we can't. Prevent these 12 links. In a linear fashion.

So when we read the sutra. And we have this discourse. And we represent it.

In this way. In this linear fashion. It is quite dangerous.

It is quite dangerous to understand it in this way. In this linear fashion. So let me reiterate.

So that you understand all of these terms. When there is ignorance. There is a formation.

A formation of phenomena. And then after that a conscience. And from consciousness.

There is a psychosoma. A physical body. So from there we can explain.

When you look at your hands. When you look at your body. You see that there is also consciousness in your body.

In your hands. There is everything in our body and our hands. In our body.

There are all these genes. All the genes that we receive. From generations of ancestors.

We received also wisdom. Insight. The way of thinking.

The way of acting. We received all of that. From past generations.

From our ancestors. We didn't receive it only from this world. Not only from our genes.

And the type of blood. And the colour of our eyes. And the colour of our hair.

We didn't only receive that. So we don't only receive. The physical genes.

But we also get the habit energy genes. I remember last year. I told a story.

Of a sister. In our community. Who had been adopted.

From birth. And through Facebook. She found her genetic biological parents.

And she invited. Her biological mother. To come to New Hamlet.

And the mother was very surprised. That the way of talking. We were all very surprised.

That the way that the sister spoke. The nun spoke. Was the same way as the mother spoke.

And so we. And although she didn't grow up. With her biological mother.

When we heard her speak. She spoke the same way as her biological mother. And so in our body.

There is consciousness. Not only our own consciousness. Our thoughts.

Our habit energy. But also all those of our ancestors. And so this body is a manifestation.

Of our consciousness. And our habits. Our eating habits.

In our daily lives. They contribute to our body. This appearance.

This physical body. The habit. Our habits of eating, drinking.

Our habits in our daily life. The way that whether we like to do sport. Exercise.

All of this contributes to our physical body. To our appearance. To our physical form.

And so when we look at our body. We also see our consciousness. When we look at the psycho.

We also see the soma. And soma is a physical form. It is a physical body.

And psycho means consciousness. Consciousness. And these two elements are inseparable.

They inter are. We can't separate them. And in the psycho soma.

We have the six sense organs. That means the eyes. The ears.

The nose. The mouth. The body.

And the mental. Our consciousness is considered. One of the six sense organs.

And when the eye is in contact with the image. We have view. And so we have a visual conscience.

And so in our psycho soma. And we have the six sense organs. And the six objects of sense organs.

And from these elements we have contact. As soon as we have an eye. We have a contact.

Because eyes look at something. And so the eyes are in contact with an image. So when you have the eyes.

With your eyes. You are seeing something. You are in contact with objects.

That is why contact. Is a mental formation. A universal mental formation.

As soon as we are awake. We are constantly in contact. With our sense organs.

So the objects of sight of sound. Is this clear for everybody. Up until here.

So the seven links. So from ignorance. There is formation.

Formation can be anger. Anger. Phenomenon that happens from ignorance.

And suffering, like suffering, or anger. So from that formation, or that impulse. We can see our consciousness.

It is in our consciousness. And from that consciousness. There is the formation.

Of the physical body. The soul. So physical formation.

So that's the psychosoma. And then there is the six organs. And then there is contact.

And when we are in contact with sounds and sites. We have a sensation of feeling. And feelings.

Are also universal mental formations. They are always there. When we are awake.

So there is positive feelings. Negative feelings. And neutral feelings.

And as soon as there is an agreeable feeling. A good feeling. Then there is attachment.

We get attached to these positive feelings. As soon as there is craving for these. There is grasping.

We want to hold on to these positive feelings. Bring us these positive feelings. And from that grasping.

There is birth. Because there is birth. There has to be rage and death.

So this is one representation of the 12 links. Interdependent co-arising. So does everybody understand what each link means? And in the course of centuries.

From the Buddhist teachings. Many masters have developed. These 12.

Had to explain them and made commentaries to their students. Can you show the other document that I sent? Please. There we are.

So in the course of centuries. They have elaborated these different theories to explain. As the cycle of Samsara.

So these 12 links. Are putting time in the past. The present and the future.

So today. We have seven. We have consciousness.

The body, the sixth sense organs. You have conscious contact. Feelings.

Attachment, grasping. Because of all that in the future. We will continue in the circle of Samsara.

To be born. Age and to die. Can you see that? In the course of centuries.

So when you read books about Buddhism. Dharma. That explain the 12.

You will often find these. Three times. The past, present and future.

In the past we lived in. And that's why in the present moment. We have this body.

These feelings. And we will continue in the circle of Samsara in the future. We will continue.

In birth to death. And. There's also another explanation.

With causes and retributions. There is a thread of cause and effect and retribution. When we do something.

So then something else happens. The result of the effect. Is clear.
In the past we have ignorance. And that's why. The result is today.
Is having this body. In this world. Because every day.
We are in contact. With sensation. We try to grasp things.
And that's why. The result. The retribution in the future.
To continue. Of birth and death. That is the presentation that.
Ordinary. That we find everywhere. Of the presentation of causes.
And retributions. Of the 12. In the three times.
There are causes and effects. That are very clear. They cause effect cause retribution.
Whichever. So I remember when I became. A novice.
A novice first. In 1993. That year.
When I. The community. Starting to establish. Time.
Spent two retreats. The rains retreat. To teach us.
The basic. So the fundamental. The fundamental Buddhism.
We can call it. What is a 101. So we were in the US.
When, when something is. Basic first course the basic course. Is always a 101.
So. So, Ty offered us. He spent months.
I remember. A three month retreat. And then he continued the next spring.
And then another. Three month retreat. So tight.
These 12 links. And then in 2012. In a retreat of three months.
He taught us again. The 12 links. So 30 years later.
30 years later, he taught us again the 12 links of interdependent co arising. With more.
Insights.
That tie had after 30 years of practise. And just to tell you that. Teaching is, is very difficult to
understand.
It's not easy to grasp. Now we can go back to the first file. When Ty showed us the
presentation of the 12 links.

He showed us. Also, another presentation that is positive. When he taught us the eightfold path.

He also showed up. Another path. There's the noble eightfold path, and then taught us also the unknowable eightfold path.

Because everything into is. So if there is you, there has to be wrong view. So if there's no wrong view, there is no right here.

And it's like that for the whole eightfold path. But I showed us these. This second April path.

What is the noble. I would say, ignorance in this path, 12 links. Ignorance could not be without clear understanding.

Right view. So, there is a positive flip version. Presented to us.

This positive version of the 12 links. So if we practise walking meditation mindful sitting meditation. It brings us clear understanding.

So we have understanding. And when we have clear understanding. We have a lot of energy and a great aspiration.

We want to practise. You want to transform our suffering to help our loved ones, and those around us. When we have a clear mind.

We have a great aspiration. And from that great aspiration. We will have understanding.

And all that is the opposite of the 12 links that we just saw that were very negative. So can we look at the links that are negative. There we go.

We can see both of them now. So, I also shows us the inter being between these 12. Ignorance.

There is no understanding without consciousness. In the consciousness and the 12 links. There's ignorance.

There's attachment. But when we look at Buddhist psychology. When we speak of consciousness.

We speak of understanding on this. There are all the scenes of ignorance. But there's also a big seeds of awakening.

We can transform our consciousness into a clear understanding. And that is right for you. And when we see consciousness here.

We're, we're talking about the individual and the collective consciousness. In our individual consciousness. And we're going to change.

After the sound of the bell. We're not master of ourselves. We manifest ourselves, our consciousness, our body.

Manifests itself from the karma that we created ourselves. But the great beings like the Buddha and the Buddha. That are awakened.

Their consciousness is, are pure and clear. They have attained awakening. And we see that from a positive self.

We use the term. We don't use a term inside. But consciousness, but inside.

So a vision. Pure and clear. So Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

So they help the world. They see their body as a body of manifestation. They can manifest themselves.

As a child, as a doctor. A beggar. To help the world.

They manifest themselves as a child. To help all other children. So when they manifest themselves.

As a person who suffers. In the world. Maybe in a war.

They can manifest themselves to help. And so they can themselves. With addiction.

In order to help others with addiction. They. They.

They decide in what kind of body. To manifest themselves. So maybe as a child or a prostitute.

Or a warrior. So they choose in what body. To manifest themselves.

This type of manifestation that they select. That they choose. They are not controlled or conditioned.

By their karma. Just like us. That's why here we say.

Body of manifestation. Body of function. It's a body that they select.

So that they can help. So that they can work. And their contact is pure.

And it's a contact in full mindfulness. In pure mindfulness. And their sensations.

Is a sensation. In mindfulness. Instead of being attached like we are.

Loving kindness. They are master of themselves. They don't try to understand like we do.

They live in equanimity. They see everything without attachment. They see the nature of interbeing.

In all phenomena. They have a mind of equanimity. So it's a beautiful existence.

In emptiness. So if we practise mindfulness. Little by little.

We get clear. To these 12 links. And to this insight.

So you know that in a lot of the sutras. And discourses. So if you dig into.
This forest of sutras. The Buddha has spoken a lot. Of 12 links.
And not 12 links. So he spoke of 9 links and not 12 links. And those are important sutras.
So there is a sutra. Which means. It means a sutra.
Of causality. And he spoke of 12 links. And in the sutra.
And Chinese sutra. And there is a sutra in which he spoke. Of 10 links.
So the sutra is in Pali. And when I speak of. The Chinese sutras.
So in the two schools. Of thoughts. So we speak of these two schools.
Of the north and of the south. So the teachings. Of the Buddha are preserved.
In Pali. And when Buddhism propagated. To the north.
His body of teachings. Were preserved in the Chinese canon. So earlier I said that.
In the Chinese and Pali. We found the same sutra. So in the two.
In these two canons. We found the same sutras. So in some sutras we found.
When we study these 12 links. We have to study them. With a free mind.
We must not be. Attached to this number of links. And not to every single word.
We have to be open minded. And that is what he taught us. If we are attached to the words.
If we grab. We can have misunderstandings. And in the sutra.
He spoke of nine links. And he did not mention. Ignorance, formation.
And the six sense organs. And objects of sense organs. And why he did not mention those
three links.
That is because in consciousness. There is already ignorance. There is already the six sense
organs.
And their objects. And there is also formation in consciousness. And so when the Buddha
presented.
These 12 links. That is to go into greater detail. So that we can better understand.
But these are not absolute teachings. If we want to speak of one link. That is also possible.
Why? Let's go back to the sutra. Before speaking of the 12 links. The Buddha said.

Attachment to being is a false view. Attachment to being is a wrong view. Attachment to non-being is also a wrong view.

So these two wrong views. He speaks. Of the middle way.

And he said this is because that is. This is born because that is born. And so if we speak of one link.

It is that link. It is that is. Because this is because that is.

This is born because that is born. And that is a simple link. If we want to speak of the 12 links.

The two links. He spoke of nine or 10 links. Depending on the sutra.

Sometimes four links. Now we can actually list. And if we want to speak of a single link.

This is because that is. This is born because that is born. If we want to speak of two links.

We can talk. About cause and retribution. If we want to use only three links.

We can talk about. We can refer to three. Periods of times.

Past, present and future. If we want to. Refer to four links.

We can mention. We can keep ignorance, formation. Birth, old age and death.

If we want to keep only five links. We can like the Buddha. Which he mentioned in another sutra.

He spoke of attachment. Seething. Birth, old age and death.

All this is to say. We must not be attached to the words. To the terms.

If we study these 12 links today. To understand. If you read other books.

You listen to other teachings. You understand these terms. This is a teaching that is difficult to understand.

I remember when I was a novice. I once said. The Buddha asked Ananda.

If he understood. If he understood the sutra on causality. If he understood those 12 links.

If he understood. If he understood. The sutra on interdependence.

Ananda said yes. The Buddha said. You should not say that.

You really have to take the time. To study. To contemplate and practise.

You think you understood. In fact you did not really understand. We have to be very careful.

We have to take the time to study. To put into practise. I remember as a novice.

When I heard this sutra. This teaching. I was always very careful.

I never said I understood this or that. Because I understood. From an intellectual perspective.

With my intellect. I had the impression I understood. What I was talking about.

What the Buddha was talking about. But I kept always in the back of my mind. Yes even Ananda.

Who was someone who really. Registered everything. If today we have.

All of these teachings from the Buddha. It is because of Ananda. He had a wonderful memory.

He had a great memory. He recited all of the teachings of the Buddha. And if we have all of these teachings today.

All of these sutras are because of him. And even he. When he understood that he understood.

The Buddha stopped him and said. No you should not say that. So that is why for many years.

I did not dare to say. To Thay I understood this. And I do not know how many times I have told you before.

But the teachings on. No birth no death. I heard Thay say so many times.

And I never. I never dared to tell him I understood. I waited and waited.

Because I did not dare to say how much. I understood. We only understand once we are found in that situation.

And if we don't find ourselves in that situation. We can't say. We can't say.

We actually understood. Whether it is death. Birth or death.

If we are not confronted to death. We cannot say how much we understand. The notion of death.

I am very happy. That we reviewed this information. Because last time.

We had the feeling that we had finished. With the sutra. That it was clear.

It was clear. It was clear that my view was clear. But this part of the 12 links.

Was not clear. I hope that. When you hear.

A text of these 12 links. You will remember. How I have explained these 12 links.

Not to fall into our deep habit. Of seeing ourselves as a separate self. That continues in this circle.

In reincarnation. And the ignorance. In these 12 links.

You can see. Ignorance is. Ignorance is that things are separate.

And that I am a separate entity. But I have a small me. That continues in the samsara.

So in a lot of Buddhist books. Lots of Buddhist masters. Use these 12 links.

To explain samsara. And if we are not conscious. We can fall back.

Into this belief of a small self. And at the keep turning round and round in samsara. So it's important to understand.

These 12 links. In the light of interbeing. In the light of interdependent co arising.

So we still have 10 minutes for questions.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

My question is. So when we speak of pure sensation. And immeasurable minds.

Can you explain. *What a pure sensation is?*

Thank you for asking this question. I wanted to explain.

The 12 links. And a little time for you to ask questions. So the most essential point.

In this Dharma talk is. What do we do with this study? What can we actually put into practise. With these 12 links? So when we study these 12 links.

There's two things that we retained. We can keep the key sentence. That the Buddha said.

This is because that is. This is not because that is not. And that really encompasses everything.

And secondly. To summarise the practise. That we can apply.

It's one sentence. Practise mindfulness. To protect our six organs.

So when I look. When I listen. When I touch.

When I'm in contact with something. If I am mindful. I can identify immediately.

If what I'm watching. Or what I'm listening to. All these sounds.

Do they water the good seeds? Or do they water bad seeds? So I say. Bad seeds. I should say suffering.

So. Good or bad seeds is a concept. Does it water the seeds of suffering? So all these sights and sounds.

Do they. Bring me. Water the seeds of happiness.

Or seeds of suffering. When we are. In right view.

With what is in our contact. We can protect ourselves. And we can.

Bring up the 12 links in a positive way. So we're cultivating. Mindfulness concentration.

Right view. And all the seeds of happiness. Are nourished and watered.

And the contact. Is no longer. An unconscious contact.

But a mindful contact. And that brings about. A chain effect.

So on the schematic I put. Peer contact. Because I was translating.

But. To understand better. And pure contact means mindful contact.

And practitioners. Or. Great beings or bodhisattvas.

Contact. Is mindful. People, they're, they're not carried away by conditions.

When we are mindful. Every time. We are in contact with something, we are masters of ourselves.

And we are no longer being carried away by current karma. Karma is something we create ourselves in every moment of our day. And I said to you that contact is a universal mental formation.

It is there at all moments. In our daily life. As soon as we are awake, we are in contact with something.

Our eyes, our ears. With our mouth. When we're eating or drinking.

And that's why. That's why time does not encourage us to spend hours and hours in sitting meditation. I encourage us to be in mindfulness at every moment of our daily life.

Because we need to function in our daily life. We need to eat, we need to go to the bathroom, we need to do stuff. And if we limit our mindfulness to moments when we're sitting on our cushion.

Our sitting meditation. We leave our sitting meditation, and we go back into our habits. And we continue to turn in circles.

If in our habit energy. Right time. Reminds us.

He helps us with all these reminders like bell, the gatha. Every moment in our daily life. We need to remember that we need to do everything in mindfulness.

Aware of all these all these contacts. So if we're turning on the faucet, or we're peeling vegetables. We are in contact with some in touch.

And these mindfulness and these office, remind us to be mindful to be with our breath. So that this contact. Be mindful contact.

When this contact is mindful. Then our senses are very well protected. We don't let.

We don't let them, and water the seeds of that are negative, or green seeds of suffering. In the present moment. We, we can appreciate the water that we have.

We can appreciate the hands, we have that that are doing things, freedom we have, and that can feed the joy and happiness. Thank you, thank you for that question. So, I will summarise.

It allows us to summarise our practise with this sutra. Is this clear for you. So, if we want to get out of this circle of suffering.

If we want to stop turning around, endlessly in suffering. We need to protect our six senses. The practise of mindfulness.

The practise of contact in mindfulness. Really wants to say something. There's a question in English, I just wanted to say.

If we're attached to a wholesome aspiration. We enter the second positive chain. Yes, absolutely.

I think we are all touching how to reformulate this. These 12 links explain our existence in this moment. I think we all here are practising mindfulness.

So we are more or less in a positive existence with a clear mind. With mindful feelings. With compassion, joy, and loving kindness, and not too much attachment.

With agreeable sensations that we are not too attached to. So I believe we are all in this existence in positive 12 links.