

DOM- Sunday, February 15th, 2026
Chanting From The Heart - Sr Dinh Nghiê
Joyfully Sharing the Merit
Transcription Audio to Text

In the book Chanting from the Heart, the chants that Thay translated and others Thay wrote. So one that we're studying today is something that Thay wrote himself and just for the title. We really thought a lot about it, how we could translate it from Vietnamese, French, and English.

It's two practices. To be followed, participate, accompany. So we're outside now to have better internet.

It's very romantic. Okay, let's continue. So this is a chant that Thay wrote himself and the title in Vietnamese is very concise.

It talks about the two practices, the two fundamental practices, following joy and the joy of others and transferring the merit to others. And that's why you see the chant, the title in English is Joyfully Sharing the Merit. And in French, it was difficult to translate and it's very long.

I'm sure it's not the best French translation. If you can find a better concise title, please send it to me. Please send me your proposal.

So let's study the text and I'm sure you'll find a better title in French for it. When we live in a community or a sangha or a family, we have a lot of interactions, a lot of contact with others. And if we practice well, she's breaking up.

If we practice by seeing the successes and happiness of others as our happiness and our joy, our happiness multiplies. And the scenes of competition and jealousy are not watered. If you notice at the village or in a monastery, when we chant, we sing the closing gatha.

In the closing gatha is a transfer of merit. So everything that we have done beautifully after a practice session, like sitting meditation, chanting, other ceremonies, all the fruits of our practice, we offer it to others. We don't keep it for ourselves.

We want to share it with others, share the merit. And it's the practice of generosity and it brings us lots of joy and happiness. And just before this session, I saw an article by chance talking about university courses at Harvard.

It was from 2020. And in this article, they say that one of the courses that was the most appreciated in the history of Harvard is the course, How to Cultivate Happiness. And lots of students, of course, signed up for this class.

How to Cultivate Joy and Well-Being. And what's surprising is that the teacher spoke a lot about, spoke a lot about giving, spoke a lot about generosity. He mentioned lots of research that were done.

The more we give, the more we are happy. And there are studies on the students. And they saw that the students that were doing volunteer work in service, in social work, are the students that are the happiest in school.

And so, service to others, service offers, brings lots of joy. It also increases success, the students' success. So, the teacher said that he observed very clearly that students that seek, that seek success in their studies, even if they have good marks, are not necessarily happy.

But students who are very generous, they are the happiest students. And this joy and this happiness will bring them towards success. So, happiness and joy brings success.

This is the right path. But if we want success first, it will not bring happiness. And the teacher really, really wanted to highlight this difference to the students.

And when I read the article, it really touched me, because it really touches on what we're studying today. And within our community, it's the same thing. The more we give, the more joy we have, the more happiness we have.

And success arrives naturally. It's global success. It's a success in our well-being, in our health, in our daily life, in our relationships.

For us, our career is monastic life. As a monk or a nun, success is defined in our vocation, in our mission. Now, I will continue with the actual chant.

Blessed ones who dwell in the world, grant us compassion. So, this is the first sentence. We recognize that around us, there are blessed ones.

There are noble beings around us. There are awakened beings. There are moments where we are very low emotionally, and we only see the negative things in life.

Everything's black. But the moment we remember that around us, that there are awakened beings, noble beings, that is soothing. The moment we remember that there is somebody that sees us and understands us, that can help us, already is good for us, makes us feel good.

And the first sentence reminds us that in this life, that the awakens are always present. It's a wonderful remembrance and a nice practice to have right view, the practice to have right thought, to see everything, and not to stay stranded in a corner, in a black corner. The awakens are always present in this life and have compassion for us.

Do not think that this sentence that we see very small and the practice of the devotion and the prayer, no, it's not. When we want to transform or change, when we want to improve, therefore, we have to be very clear and very humble. And if we are arrogant, if we are proud, we cannot change anything.

So have compassion for us. Grant us compassion reminds me that we need help and love. Somebody who says, I don't need any help.

I have everything. This person maybe doesn't open her heart, his or her heart to receive all the energy in the universe, the energy of our ancestors, genetical and or spiritual ancestor. They're always there just to support us, to help us.

But if I feel, I feel I don't need any help, I can live by myself, then I cannot benefit from all that energy. And it's unfortunate for me. And it's a loss for me.

And I don't see the interdependence and interbeing. I don't see that nature of inter-earth between me and others. Therefore, this sentence reminds us of this truth about me and around me.

Because in this encounter of life before, before the beginningless times, our mistakes have caused much sufferings to ourselves and others. Because in this life before, from the beginning of times, here, do not think to my other lives in the past as reincarnated. Sister Dignam is speaking.

So, when you hear in this encounter life before, from the beginningless time, do not think from past lives when you were reincarnated. Do not think in that direction. Because the last time when we studied the Middle Way Sutra, we are training to think to free ourselves from the self.

Do you remember? If we think a self that is permanent, that is yourself, therefore, it's not a right view. Here, in this and countless lives before, from beginningless times, we can think to our ancestor. We can think about our ancestors, about our environment, about nature.

Because we are our ancestors. We are the continuity of our ancestors. We are the continuity of everything that happens in our environment and in the world.

And therefore, since beginningless time means our ancestor, our genetical ancestor who made mistakes from a long time ago, and since we are the continuation of our ancestors, we have committed these mistakes. We are receiving the fruit from those mistakes. In this current life, I make the mistakes.

And from many other times, from beginningless time, we have caused much suffering to ourselves and others. And who can say that I have not made a mistake? Who amongst ourselves can say that? Nobody. Nobody can say that.

Even if we don't see the mistakes that we have made in this life, even if we don't see them, we have to remember that what I do not see is what I do not see, but I have a certitude that I have committed mistakes, quite a few. And, and you know, kids or babies, at the time of their coming into the world after a few years, they have received a sickness, fatal sickness, accidents. And often we, we say how these innocent beings who have not done anything wrong, why do they have to suffer all of that? But if we look with interbeing, the light of interbeing, if we look with the light of of this song, chant, we can see that this child is the continuation of their parents and their grandparents and their ancestors.

And it's true that during these very short years, they have done nothing. They haven't done anything wrong. They haven't caused anything as something wrong.

They have not made any mistake, but they are the fruit of their parents and their ancestors. And therefore we see all a current stream of life. And that's why I can see that there are many, many parents that love their children.

And with the presence of their parents, they have, they have changed their way of life. They have done everything they can for the wellbeing of their children. They had addictions or drugs in as soon as they saw, then they, as soon as they learned that they would be a father, they had the courage to change their way of life, to stop abruptly their addiction because they love their children and they have the courage to do anything for their child.

I see also parents that come to Plum Village during the summer and they don't feel the need to practice for themselves since the talk is restarting. In a few words, I was saying that a lot of parents are trying to do everything for their kids and they also try to practice for their child or children. In hiding or openly, we have committed, she's reading from the text, we have done wrong, encourage others to do wrong and given our cursing to acts of killing, stealing, deceiving, sexual misconducts, and other harmful actions at among the thin, unwholesome deeds.

So here we talk about the five mindfulness training. When we do not practice the five mindfulness trainings, we can cause suffering to others in hiding or openly, or we favorize others to do wrong. So either openly or in hiding, that we either we cause suffering or we incite others to cause the suffering, the fruit is the same, the fruits are the same, and these mistakes are the same.

The fruits of our errors are the same, but the bad seeds within us are even more touched because there is the seeds of deceit that are also watered. If we push somebody else to do something bad, or we do it, do a mistake in hiding, the fruit is the suffering caused is just as much, but it's twofold because our seeds of deceit has also been watered in us. And here the five mindfulness trainings are mentioned as well as the 10 unwholesome deeds.

So you know there's a sutra that speaks about the 10 precepts. So for OI members, you know that the 10 precepts have three that talk about the body, four that talk about speech, and three that speak about thoughts. And the three first precepts that speak about the body they're the same as the three mindfulness trainings.

It's a respect for life, generosity, and true love. And then the next four precepts are about speech. The first is not to lie.

The second is not to exaggerate. Sometimes we exaggerate for our own interest. The second one is exaggerating.

The third is insulting, using hateful speech when we insult others. Sorry, there's no more sound. The fourth is speech.

So it's having a forked tongue. It means when I speak to one person, I say one thing. And when I speak to another person, I say something else.

Sometimes it's even the opposite. So I don't say, because I'm not saying the same thing to everyone, I can cause disharmony within the family, within the community. I can cause war.

In Vietnamese, we say a double tongue. So through the fourth of the five mindfulness trainings, the fourth mindfulness training, it's actually developed into four separate trainings in the ten trainings. So even more speech can cause even more damage than the body often.

So there's three trainings for the body. But just for speech, there's four. And then the last three precepts of the ten precepts concern thoughts.

And these, they touch on ignorance, desire, and anger. So I will reread this passage. Whether our faults are known to others or whether they are hidden, we have done wrong, encouraged others to do wrong, and given our consent to acts of killing, stealing, deceiving, sexual misconduct, and other harmful actions among the ten unwholesome deeds.

And these errors bring us, have brought us to the realms of hell, hungry ghosts, and animals. Let us breathe together. So we often hear about these hell realms, hungry ghosts, and animals.

This is what we call hell. And we create this hell. The realm of the hungry ghosts, They spoke a lot about hungry ghosts, people who don't manage to open their heart to receive the love.

If we have a lot of doubts, if we have confidence in no one, we can't receive anything. A hungry ghost is a spirit that is very hungry. Within the Buddhist literature, the illustration of a hungry ghost is the image of a body with a large belly and a throat as small as a needle.

With a throat so small as a needle, they can no longer swallow, they can't drink or eat, and they are starving. But they can't eat. There's also the story of a hungry ghost, story of Muhammad Ghalyana's mother.

His mother is full of desire. So the mother was very stingy and full of desire. And Muhammad Ghalyana knew that everything his mother had done wrong would certainly bring her in the direction into suffering.

And in a story it said that Muhammad Ghalyana saw that she was in hell realms, and he brought her food. And she was very happy. She could not swallow.

It was a story, a Buddhist story that illustrates a hungry ghost. Even if they have food in front of them, they can't swallow it. Even if there is love, even if there are friends, even if there are family members that want to offer love.

And so we create this hell realm. And sometimes people within a family create their own hell with false perceptions. Other members of the family, so we create this hell within ourselves.

We can become a hungry ghost because of our way of perceiving and thinking. And the world of the beasts. Here is just an example.

But we can see that the animals are very intelligent. A lot of the animals are like humans. And here we can see that the world of beasts is just an example, or animals is just an example.

So those who follow their instinct without a consciousness that come with ethics, and then it can cause a lot of suffering, and cause a suffering to themselves and to others. That's just an

example. These mystics make us reborn in, she's reading from the text again, causing us to be born in places filled with pain and suffering.

These mystics that make us reborn with sense organs that are not working well. And here we can see that in the light of the continuation of our false lifestream. And it's not a self that is reincarnating.

I have to repeat that if not. We have often the tendency to think about reincarnation in that way. And to be reborn with misformed organs and senses.

Because when we are born with all of these corrects, we often forget that it's a great blessing. In the past, when medicine was not as advanced as today, to give birth to a child, a beautiful child, was the dream of everybody. Of all parents, of all families, of everybody.

But today, because medicine is quite advanced, then we can have, we can look with a camera inside, we can make interventions. And today, to have a body, and to have an able body, is common. Common.

We can see, sometimes we think this is normal. And in certain countries, Asian countries, in some Asian countries, in Plum Village, at the first full ordination in 1992, Thay did a revolution, conducted, led a revolution, in transmitting the full ordination in the past. Sister Yim is talking again.

In the past, if a monk or a monastic, if a monk or a monastic was handicapped or had incapacitated, that they cannot, making them unable to serve, and making them dependent on the community. And if this person cannot serve, but on the contrary, the others must take care of that monastic. Then that caused a lot of complexity and inferiority complex.

Therefore, it was very difficult in the community life. And that's why one of the criteria for the full ordination was to be fully able-bodied from the sense organ perspective. So at Plum Village, today, currently, Thay created a revolution in ordaining such, of such monastics.

But in the literature, it's mentioned that sense organs, that it's a great blessing to have sense organs, able sense organs, because we can, because we can be, in quotations, independent, because we do not have to be taken care for by others. And in reading these lines, we remembered that we have a lot of luck if we don't have any sense organs that are handicapped and incapacitated. And the mistakes that we make can lead us to be reborn in areas that are isolated and not civilized.

I have said that today, with technology, that we live, or we live in town, whether we live in town or in the countryside, it's the same. Well, well, actually, there's very little difference. But in ancient times, in ancient times, in these regions, there was very little means.

And these regions could be very isolated and quite uncivilized. When I think about my grandparents, my mother was talking about how it used to be in the countryside. So maybe when we read today about uncivilized and far, we cannot imagine these regions.

But in the past, when we, when I was listening to my mother about Vietnam countryside, I saw a very big difference between the towns and the regions that were between the regions that were isolated, there was a big difference with the towns and without favorable

conditions to grow up and to become a virtuous person. And even in the past, in order to go to school, people had to go far, because, because there was no schools. So here, this, this text talks about the environment, the environment is very important to grow up, to have a wide view, a just view, and collective consciousness is very important as well.

Later, when we will study Amitabha Sutta, that speaks about paradise, we will see that a good environment, an environment with lots of good friends, where we can learn lots of things that can support us. Here, a virtuous person means someone who can bring joy and happiness to others. Today, we are continuing with the text, body and mind together.

Today, we are determined with one point of concentration to repent the obstacles of our past unwholesome actions. So this whole passage is about beginning anew. And beginning anew is very important for a good practice to finding joy from the benefits of others, the joys of others, and offering them up to all beings, offering the best we can to all beings.

In the first part of this sutras, about beginning anew, and the second paragraph, so, so the second part, that we want to rejoice in the good of the successes of others. Blessed ones, be our witness and look upon us with compassion. We surrender before you and make this aspiration.

We spoke about the generosity to offer, offering food and clothing, if we've used loving speech, even if it was just one or two sentences. If we looked upon things, even for a single moment, if we have ever comforted or consoled, even if only once or twice. So we offer food and simple garments.

We're also speaking about actions of love. Before, when people were very poor, food and garments were very important. Now, in developed countries, people don't need these offerings.

What's missing now is compassion. So this passage, okay, speaks about sympathize with the eyes of compassion, actions like helping others. And this is part of our practice, like Thich Nhat Hanh practice.

And then, if we have listened to the Dharma carefully, if we've offered food to monks and nuns, even if only once. You know, in Asian countries, offering food to monks and nuns is a very common practice, especially during the three-month rains retreat, because during that time, monks and nuns stay in one place. They can't roam the countryside.

So laypeople bring them food. It's a very regular practice. If we have ever saved a life, even if it was only ants and worms, even if it's an ant, even if it's very small, but we take the time to help it, to save it, to bring it out of danger.

This action is very small, but we are watering seeds of love in us. And especially in our very busy world, just to stop a few seconds or a few minutes to save an ant, some sort of small insect, it's a lot, especially in a very busy world, very busy life that we have. So even such a small act, but really it's not small.

If we have recited a sutra, even if only a few lines, if we've been a monk or a nun, even if it was only for one life, this is a list of all acts. And we take all these small little actions and we

bring them all together like a garland of flowers that we want to offer. And we want to transmit the merit to all beings to realize nirvana.

And when we make the vow to become a monk or a nun, we make the vow to be a monastic, not only for this life, but for many lives to come for a very long time. I remember when I became a novice, we have a gatha we recite. Every time that we put our sagati robes on, and the last line of this poem, this gatha, I make the vow to wear this robe life after life.

And so when a monk or a nun who makes this vow and does not manage to embody this vow and abandons monastic life, they feel very bad. They feel disappointed and don't dare come back to the monastery. In France, it's less so, but in Asia, this feeling of guilt is very, very, very deep.

And you know that the feeling of guilt is very heavy in Asia and sometimes a little heavy here in Plum Village. So that's why Thay has created a revolution again in roughly 2000, I don't remember exactly which year, Thay started a new tradition to have the monastic program in five steps for five years. So that opened a new door because the reality is that not a lot of monastics and monks succeed to pursue this path up to the end of this life.

There are some that don't succeed and abandon. And more often than not, in the Western world for the Western monks and monastics to follow that life, it's too difficult. So Thay has created a new tradition of five months.

And you know that the tradition, Theravada tradition in Thailand, all the lay people are encouraged to be monks, to be monks for a few months, especially men, it's like military service. And sometimes before a marriage, the woman will ask the man if they have passed, have you been a monk for a few months? And if the young man says yes, then therefore he has more credits, credibility. And Thay has found this tradition really nice, so that lay people have a chance to practice with their whole heart in monasteries, it gives them a great baggage for the rest of their life in the actual world.

So therefore, in thinking at this Theravada tradition, Thay has had a lot of conviction to start this new tradition in Plum Village to open a new door for young people who want to become monks or monastics for five years. It's a five-year commitment. So mostly for Western monks and monastics, after five years, a lot of them continue their monastic life in the village.

And there's quite a few that go on past the five years. So therefore, do not be surprised if you see that sentence. So don't be surprised if you see the sentence about the monks who have been monks during at least one life.

We have practiced the precepts or the mindfulness trainings. If we have ever observed mindfulness trainings, we have to change some things in the text. Since it was published since 2009, we will be revisiting.

So back to the text. If we have observed the mindfulness trainings, even if imperfectly, and you know that Thay, only Thay, has created as well a tradition with the five mindfulness trainings. If we go to other temples, when you receive the five mindfulness trainings, or you receive them only in Plum Village, can you receive one, two, or three with a lot of love? Thay did everything to encourage lay people to practice mindfulness.

Thay did everything for people to receive just one training. It's good enough. And Thay said, the mindfulness trainings inter-are.

So therefore, if you receive one and you fully practice, therefore, therefore you're practicing them all. And there are people who have practiced them, and after a while, and they've let go of practicing. And like a father loves their kids, Thay tells them to renew their practice.

And that's what happens in Plum Village and not in other traditions or, or practice centers. You know, in Asia, when you receive the five mindfulness training, you receive them once in your life, that's all. You don't renew them.

But in Plum Village, Thay has allowed his students to renew them. And Thay, and as written in this chant, if we have ever observed the mindfulness trainings, even imperfectly, and even a little, with a lot of compassion, he understands that all his students don't achieve more than practicing a little. And that's just, that's enough.

These are all good seeds that have been sowed. And we are all into a, all together in the fragrant flower of garlands that we offer to the Buddha, and offer to the, all the beings and to the realization of awakening. And so then reading this chant written by Thay, we can sense, we can feel his compassion and love.

The feeling of guilt is not helpful at all. And Thay has everything that he's said and written, and all, always are words that are encouraging. Even if we don't manage to practice perfectly, even if we practice just a little, it's, it's already good.

And we have to learn with looking, with these eyes of understanding and encouragement towards ourselves. We have to recognize what is good within us, even if it's a little. If, but if we remember and direct our attention to what is beautiful, at what is good within ourselves, we will cultivate motivation, joy, encouraging, encouragement, understanding, and love towards ourselves.

If we have too much expectations with ourselves, if, if we put a, an objective that's too high, and every day we are disappointed, we are discouraged, we blame ourselves, therefore that's not good. And we, and we avoid going to extremes, either letting go completely, and not looking at what's going bad. It's, in us that's, that's an extreme to admit, it's an extreme to avoid.

And the other extreme is to be too strict, too rigid with, with ourselves, too hard on ourselves. You have to avoid these two extremes. And we have understanding and love for ourselves.

We can avoid these two extremes. Understanding. To have understanding, you have to have full mindfulness.

When we have mindfulness, and we see ourselves new, we see ourselves in the reality as it is, then we can avoid these two extremes. Because we see the whole picture. We're not stuck in details, or in a corner of the picture.

And the definition of mindfulness is to be, to be aware of what's in me, and around me. To be conscious of oneself. And we transmit all these benefits to all the beings, to, towards the realization of awakening.

The objective to transfer all the well-being to all beings, it's not for the others become rich, for the others to become, to succeed, for them to succeed, or something along those lines. It is something, it is, the goal is for them to achieve awakening. That's the real goal.

Because it's awakening that, that helps us to come out of suffering. You know? There's a lot, a lot of Buddhists today that, that, that pray a lot. In Asia, or even in the Western world, the temples are filled with Buddhists, are praying to be, to be successful, to be rich, to be spared by accidents.

But that's not the objective of our practice, of transferring the merits. When we chant this, the poem, the closing gatha, or closing sutra, we are not, in that realm, we are looking at the goal of awakening. The only goal is to free ourselves from suffering.

And Thay, I remember Thay saying when we were studying this chant, he's, in the community, he's reminded us that what you do in the community has service. You can work day and night, and what you expect is that the others acknowledge what you see, or, or see what you're doing, and therefore the benefit is very small. It varies, can be as small as a peanut.

With, with, with that very small benefit, can you transfer to others? Because the only thing that you're doing is for, to get the others' recognitions. When we're looking for recognition, it's usually for success, fame. It's not for awakening.

And if we practice, and we do good deeds, even if we do lots, lots of good acts, but if the goal is fame and recognition, well, then we can transfer very little of this. We receive very little merit, and we have very little merit to transfer to others. But if we think of what we're doing for our family, or our community, or for ourselves, we always think of our practice, we think of our liberation, our awakening.

The fruit is huge for ourselves, and this energy that we generate within ourselves and around us, whether others are available or aware of it or not, they receive the energy immediately. Even if we don't wish to transfer the fruits of our actions, the others receive it. At the end of this chant, we sing, we sing, we sing the transfer of the merit to water the seeds of generosity within us, to remind us that everything that we do is for our practice and for awakening.

It's not by reciting this poem, or this chant, that we actually transfer it. That we chant it or not, the transfer, we receive the fruits, and others do as well, whether it's small or large. We don't need to chant to transmit this merit.

It's more of a reminder for us. Oh, in the last passage, speaks of our aspiration, may we be diligent and transform our suffering and the suffering of all species, all of our speech, body, mind. We wish to transfer this happiness to all beings.

We are seeking understanding and the embodiment of love. There's no other desire. All Buddhas in the ten directions, the three times, have offered their merits, and we are doing the same today.

Repenting all our faults, we've begun anew. We joyfully contribute to the immeasurable ocean of merit. You can ask yourself, what is merit? Merit is happiness.

So merit or happiness are towering peaks, and the Buddha and the ancestral teachers are the light which shows us the way. In this solemn moment, with all our force, we come back to ourselves and bow deeply with respect. Earlier, I said something wrong.

I said that the second part was the practice of transferring the fruits of our practice to others. It's not rejoicing in other people's actions.

There, we have finished the chant, and I've just realized, in the last words I'd like to say, because it's a chant that Thay wrote himself, it comes from his own practice.