

Thich Nhat Hanh

no death,

no fear



Comforting Wisdom for Life

In my hermitage in France there is a bush of japonica, Japanese quince. The bush usually blossoms in the spring, but one winter it had been quite warm and the flower buds had come early. During the night a cold snap arrived and brought with it frost. The next day while doing walking meditation, I noticed that all the buds on the bush had died. I recognized this and thought, *This New Year we will not have enough flowers to decorate the altar of the Buddha.*

A few weeks later the weather became warm again. As I walked in my garden I saw new buds on the japonica manifesting another generation of flowers. I asked the japonica flowers: "Are you the same as the flowers that died in the frost or are you different flowers?" The flowers replied to me: "Thay, we are not the same and we are not different. When conditions are sufficient we manifest and when conditions are not sufficient we go into hiding. It's as simple as that."

This is what the Buddha taught. When conditions are sufficient things manifest. When conditions are no longer sufficient things withdraw. They wait until the moment is right for them to manifest again.

Before giving birth to me, my mother was pregnant with another baby. She had a miscarriage, and that person wasn't born. When I was young I used to ask the question: was that my brother or was that me? Who was trying to manifest at that time? If a baby has been lost it means that conditions were not enough for him to manifest and the child has decided to withdraw in order to wait for better conditions. "I had better withdraw; I'll come back again soon, my dearest." We have to respect his or her will. If you see the world with eyes like this, you will suffer much less. Was it my brother that my mother lost? Or maybe I was about to come out but instead I said, "It isn't time yet," so I withdrew.

### *Becoming Nothing*

Our greatest fear is that when we die we will become nothing. Many of us believe that our entire existence is only a life span beginning the moment we are born or conceived and ending the moment we die. We believe that we are born from nothing and that when we die we become nothing. And so we are filled with fear of annihilation.

The Buddha has a very different understanding of our existence. It is the understanding that birth and death are notions. They are not real. The fact that we think they are true makes a powerful illusion that causes our suffering. The

Buddha taught that there is no birth, there is no death; there is no coming, there is no going; there is no same, there is no different; there is no permanent self, there is no annihilation. We only think there is. When we understand that we cannot be destroyed, we are liberated from fear. It is a great relief. We can enjoy life and appreciate it in a new way.

### *Finding a Lost Loved One*

The same thing happens when we lose any of our beloved ones. When conditions are not right to support life, they withdraw. When I lost my mother I suffered a lot. When we are only seven or eight years old it is difficult to think that one day we will lose our mother. Eventually we grow up and we all lose our mothers, but if you know how to practice, when the time comes for the separation you will not suffer too much. You will very quickly realize that your mother is always alive within you.

The day my mother died, I wrote in my journal, "A serious misfortune of my life has arrived." I suffered for more than one year after the passing away of my mother. But one night, in the highlands of Vietnam, I was sleeping in the hut in my hermitage. I dreamed of my mother. I saw myself sitting with her, and we were having a wonderful talk. She looked young and beautiful, her hair flowing down. It was so

pleasant to sit there and talk to her as if she had never died. When I woke up it was about two in the morning, and I felt very strongly that I had never lost my mother. The impression that my mother was still with me was very clear. I understood then that the idea of having lost my mother was just an idea. It was obvious in that moment that my mother is always alive in me.

I opened the door and went outside. The entire hillside was bathed in moonlight. It was a hill covered with tea plants, and my hut was set behind the temple halfway up. Walking slowly in the moonlight through the rows of tea plants, I noticed my mother was still with me. She was the moonlight caressing me as she had done so often, very tender, very sweet . . . wonderful! Each time my feet touched the earth I knew my mother was there with me. I knew this body was not mine alone but a living continuation of my mother and my father and my grandparents and great-grandparents. Of all my ancestors. These feet that I saw as "my" feet were actually "our" feet. Together my mother and I were leaving footprints in the damp soil.

From that moment on, the idea that I had lost my mother no longer existed. All I had to do was look at the palm of my hand, feel the breeze on my face or the earth under my feet to remember that my mother is always with me, available at any time.

When you lose a loved one, you suffer. But if you know how to look deeply, you have a chance to realize that his or her nature is truly the nature of no birth, no death. There is manifestation and there is the cessation of manifestation in order to have another manifestation. You have to be very keen and very alert in order to recognize the new manifestations of just one person. But with the practice and with effort you can do it.

So, taking the hand of someone who knows the practice, together do walking meditation. Pay attention to all the leaves, the flowers, the birds and the dewdrops. If you can stop and look deeply, you will be able to recognize your beloved one manifesting again and again in many forms. You will again embrace the joy of life.

### *Nothing Is Born, Nothing Dies*

A French scientist, whose name is Lavoisier, declared, "*Rien ne se crée, rien ne se perd.*" "Nothing is born, nothing dies." Although he did not practice as a Buddhist but as a scientist, he found the same truth the Buddha discovered.

Our true nature is the nature of no birth and no death. Only when we touch our true nature can we transcend the fear of non-being, the fear of annihilation.

The Buddha said that when conditions are sufficient something manifests and we say it exists. When one or two conditions fail and the thing does not manifest in the same way, we then say it does not exist. According to the Buddha, to qualify something as existing or not existing is wrong. In reality, there is no such thing as totally existing or totally not existing.

We can see this very easily with television and radio. We may be in a room that has no television or radio. And while we are in that room, we may think that television programs and radio programs do not exist in that room. But all of us know that the space in the room is full of signals. The signals of these programs are filling the air everywhere. We need only one more condition, a radio or a television set, and many forms, colors and sounds will appear. It would have been wrong to say that the signals do not exist because we did not have a radio or television to receive and manifest them. They only seemed not to exist because the causes and conditions were not enough to make the television program manifest. So at that moment, in that room, we say they do not exist. Just because we do not perceive something, it is not correct to say it does not exist. It is only our notion of being and non-being that makes us confused. It is our notion of being and non-being that makes us think something exists or something doesn't exist. Notions of being and non-being cannot be applied to reality.

### *No Above, No Below*

It is like the notion of above and below. To say they exist is also wrong. What is below for us is above for someone else somewhere else. We are sitting here and we say that above is the direction over our head and we think that the opposite direction is below.

People practicing sitting meditation on the other side of the world would not agree that what we call above is above because for them it is below. They are not sitting on their heads. The ideas of above and below always mean to be above something or to be below something, and the ideas of below and above cannot be applied to the reality of the cosmos. These are only concepts to help us relate to our environment. They are concepts that give us a point of reference, but they are not real. Reality is free from all concepts and ideas.

### *Trapped by a Notion*

The Buddha offered an interesting parable concerning ideas and notions. A young tradesman came home and saw that his house had been robbed and burned by bandits. Right outside what was left of the house, there was a small, charred body. He thought the body belonged to his little boy. He did not

know that his child was still alive. He did not know that after having burned the house, the bandits had taken the little boy away with them. In his state of confusion, the tradesman believed the body he saw was his son. So he cried, he beat his chest and pulled out his hair in grief. Then he began the cremation ceremony.

This man loved his little boy so much. His son was the *raison d'être* of his life. He longed for his little boy so much that he could not abandon the little boy's ashes even for one moment. He made a velvet bag and put the ashes inside. He carried the bag with him day and night, and whether he was working or resting, he was never separated from the bag of ashes. One night his son escaped from the robbers. He came to the new house built by his father. He knocked excitedly on the door at two o'clock in the morning. His father called out as he wept, still holding the bag of ashes. "Who is there?"

"It's me, your son!" the boy answered through the door.

"You naughty person, you are not my boy. My child died three months ago. I have his ashes with me right here." The little boy continued to beat on the door and cried and cried. He begged over and over again to come in, but his father continued to refuse him entry. The man held firm to the notion that his little boy was already dead and that this other child was some heartless person who had come to torment him. Finally, the boy left and the father lost his son forever.

The Buddha said that if you get caught in one idea and

consider it to be "the truth," then you miss the chance to know the truth. Even if the truth comes in person and knocks at your door, you will refuse to open your mind. So if you are committed to an idea about truth or to an idea about the conditions necessary for your happiness, be careful. The first Mindfulness Training is about freedom from views:

*Aware of the suffering created by fanaticism and intolerance, we are determined not to be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory or ideology, even Buddhist ones. Buddhist teachings are guiding means to help us learn to look deeply and to develop our understanding and compassion. They are not doctrines to fight, kill or die for.*

This is a practice to help free us from the tendency to be dogmatic. Our world suffers so much from dogmatic attitudes. The first mindfulness training is important to help us remain free people. Freedom is above all else freedom from our own notions and concepts. If we get caught in our notions and concepts, we can make ourselves suffer and we can also make those we love suffer.

*No Coming, No Going*

For many of us, our greatest pain is caused by our notions of coming and going. We think that the person we loved came to us from somewhere and has now gone away somewhere. But our true nature is the nature of no coming, no going. We have not come from anywhere, we shall not go anywhere. When conditions are sufficient, we manifest. When conditions are no longer sufficient, we no longer manifest. It does not mean that we do not exist. Like radio waves without a radio, we do not manifest.

Not only do the notions of coming and going not express reality, neither do the notions of being and non-being. We hear these words in the Prajnaparamita Sutra: "Listen Shariputra, all dharmas [phenomena] are marked by emptiness, they are neither produced nor destroyed, neither increasing nor decreasing."

The meaning of emptiness here is very important; it means first of all to be empty of a separate self. Nothing has a separate self, and nothing exists by itself. If we examine things carefully we will see that all phenomena, including ourselves, are composites. We are made up of other parts. We are made of our mother and father, our grandmothers and grandfathers, our body, our feelings, our perceptions, our mental formations, the earth, the sun and innumerable non-self elements.

All these parts depend on causes and conditions. We see that all that has existed, exists or will exist is interconnected and interdependent. All that we see has only manifested because it is a part of something else, of other conditions that make it possible to manifest. All phenomena are neither produced nor destroyed, because they are in a constant process of manifesting.

We may be intelligent enough to understand this, but to understand it intellectually is not enough. To really understand this is to be free from fear. It is to become enlightened. It is to live in inter-being.

We have to practice looking deeply like this to nourish our awakened understanding of no birth and no death in our daily lives. In this way we can realize the wonderful gift of non-fear.

If we just talk about inter-being as a theory, it will not help us. We should ask: "Piece of paper, where do you come from? Who are you? What did you come here to do? Where are you going to go?" We can ask the flame: "Flame, where do you come from and where will you go?" Listen to the reply closely. The flame, the piece of paper, is replying by its presence. We only have to look deeply and we can hear it reply. The flame is saying: "I do not come from anywhere."

That would be the answer of the japonica flowers also. They were not the same and not different. They did not come from anywhere and they did not go anywhere. If there

is a baby who is lost, we should not be sad. It is because there were not sufficient causes and conditions for it to arrive at that time. It will come again.

### *Sadness Lies in Ignorance*

The Great Being Avalokiteshvara was a disciple of the Buddha. One day, when he was concentrating in the course of deep understanding, he suddenly saw that everything is without a separate self. Seeing this, he overcame all ignorance, which means he overcame all his suffering.

Looking deeply, we should also see that there is no birth, there is no death; there is no coming, there is no going; there is no being, there is no non-being; there is no same, there is no different.

If we don't learn this practice, it is a terrible waste. We can learn many practices to lessen our sadness and our suffering, but the cream of enlightened wisdom is the insight of no birth, no death. When we have this insight we will have no more fear. We can then enjoy the immense inheritance our ancestors have handed down to us. We should make time to practice these deep and wonderful teachings in our daily lives.

### *Respecting Our Manifestations*

If you look at a friend with the eyes of a meditator, you will see in him or her all generations of their ancestors. You will be very respectful to them and to your own body because you will see their body and your body as the sacred home of all our ancestors.

You will also see that our bodies are the source of all future generations. We will not damage our bodies, because that wouldn't be kind to our descendants. We do not use drugs and we do not eat or drink things that have toxins or that will harm our bodies. This is because our insight of manifestation helps us to live in a healthy way, with clarity and responsibility.

The ideas of inside and outside are also like this. If we say that the Buddha is in us, our parents are in us, our parents are outside of us, or the Buddha is outside of us, these ideas of inside and outside are not applicable. We are caught in ideas, especially ideas of coming and going and being and not being. Only when we rid ourselves of all these ideas can reality appear, the reality of nirvana. When all ideas of is and is not have been extinguished, then reality will manifest itself.



*There Is Nothing Like Experience*

We can use an example that is easy to understand, of a tangerine or a durian fruit. If there is a person who has never eaten a tangerine or a durian fruit, however many images or metaphors you give him, you cannot describe to him the reality of those fruits. You can only do one thing: give him a direct experience. You cannot say: "Well, the durian is a little bit like the jackfruit or like a papaya." You cannot say anything that will describe the experience of a durian fruit. The durian fruit goes beyond all ideas and notions. The same is true of a tangerine. If you have never eaten a tangerine, however much the other person loves you and wants to help you understand what a tangerine tastes like, they will never succeed by describing it. The reality of the tangerine goes beyond ideas. Nirvana is the same; it is the reality that goes beyond ideas. It is because we have ideas about nirvana that we suffer. Direct experience is the only way.

Two

THE REAL FEAR



We are afraid of death, we are afraid of separation, and we are afraid of nothingness. In the West, people are very afraid of nothingness. When they hear about emptiness, people are also very afraid, but emptiness just means the extinction of ideas. Emptiness is not the opposite of existence. It is not nothingness or annihilation. The idea of existence has to be removed and so does the idea of nonexistence. Emptiness is a tool to help us.

Reality has nothing to do with existence and nonexistence. When Shakespeare says: "To be, or not to be—that is the question," the Buddha answers: "To be or not to be is not the question." To be and not to be are just two ideas opposing each other. But they are not reality, and they do not describe reality.

Not only does awakened insight remove the notion of permanence, but it also removes the notion of impermanence. The notion of emptiness is the same. Emptiness is an instrument, and if you are caught in the notion of emptiness you are lost. The Buddha said in the Ratnakuta Sutra: "If you are caught by the notion of being and non-being, then the

notion of emptiness can help you to get free. But if you are caught by the notion of emptiness, there's no hope." The teaching on emptiness is a tool helping you to get the real insight of emptiness, but if you consider the tool as the insight, you just get caught in an idea.

If you have a notion about nirvana, that notion should be removed. Nirvana is empty of all notions, including the notion of nirvana. If you are caught in the notion of nirvana, you have not touched nirvana yet. This deep insight and discovery of the Buddha took him beyond fear, beyond anxiety and suffering and beyond birth and death.

### *Burning Our Notions*

When you have a match, you have the condition to make a fire. If the flame you make with the match lasts long enough, it will also burn up the match. The match gives rise to the fire, but the fire itself burns up the match; the teaching of impermanence is the same. It helps us to have the awakened understanding of impermanence, and the insight of impermanence is what will burn up our idea of impermanence.

We have to go beyond the idea of permanence, but we also have to go beyond the idea of impermanence. Then we can be in touch with nirvana. The same is true of no self. No self is the match; it helps to give rise to the fire of the insight

of no self. It is the awakened understanding of no self that will burn up the match of no self.

To practice is not to store up a lot of ideas about no self, impermanence, nirvana or anything else; that is just the work of a cassette recorder. To speak about and distribute ideas is not the study or practice of Buddhism. We can go to a university to study Buddhism, but we will learn only theories and ideas. We want to go beyond ideas to have real insight, which will burn up all our ideas and help us to be free.

### *Where Is Nirvana?*

Look at a quarter. One side of it is called heads, the other side is called tails; they cannot exist without each other. The metal from which they are made contains them both. Without the metal the two sides would not exist. The three elements, heads, tails and metal, inter-are. The metal we could describe as something like nirvana, and the heads and tails as something like the manifestation of impermanence and no self. Through the appearance of either the tails or the heads, you can touch and recognize the presence of the metal. Similarly by looking deeply into the nature of impermanence and no self, you can also touch the nature of nirvana.

The ultimate dimension of nirvana cannot be separated from the historical dimension. When you touch deeply the

historical dimension, you also touch the ultimate dimension. The ultimate dimension is always in you. For a practitioner it's very important to touch his or her own nature of impermanence and non-self. If he is successful he will touch the nature of nirvana and attain non-fear. Now he can ride on the waves of birth and death, smiling serenely.

### *The Historical and Ultimate Dimensions*

We look upon reality in our daily lives through the historical dimension, but we can also look upon the same reality in the ultimate dimension. Reality can be manifested in the historical dimension, or it can be manifested in the ultimate dimension. We are similar. We have our daily and historical concerns, but each of us also has our ultimate concerns.

When we look for God or nirvana or the deepest kind of peace, we are concerned about the ultimate. We are not only concerned with the facts of daily life—fame, profit, or our position in society and our projects—but we are also concerned about our true nature. To meditate deeply is to begin to fulfill our ultimate concern.

### *Waves Are Water*

When you look at the surface of the ocean, you can see waves coming up and going down. You can describe these waves in terms of high or low, big or small, more vigorous or less vigorous, more beautiful or less beautiful. You can describe a wave in terms of beginning and end, birth and death. That can be compared to the historical dimension. In the historical dimension, we are concerned with birth and death, more powerful, less powerful, more beautiful, less beautiful, beginning and end and so on.

Looking deeply, we can also see that the waves are at the same time water. A wave may like to seek its own true nature. The wave might suffer from fear, from complexes. A wave may say, "I am not as big as the other waves," "I am oppressed," "I am not as beautiful as the other waves," "I have been born and I have to die." The wave may suffer from these things, these ideas. But if the wave bends down and touches her true nature she will realize that she is water. Then her fear and complexes will disappear.

Water is free from the birth and death of a wave. Water is free from high and low, more beautiful and less beautiful. You can talk in terms of more beautiful or less beautiful, high or low, only in terms of waves. As far as water is concerned, all these concepts are invalid.

Our true nature is the nature of no birth and no death. We do not have to go anywhere in order to touch our true nature. The wave does not have to look for water because she is water. We do not have to look for God, we do not have to look for our ultimate dimension or nirvana, because we are nirvana, we are God.

You are what you are looking for. You are already what you want to become. You can say to the wave, "My dearest wave, you are water. You don't have to go and seek water. Your nature is the nature of nondiscrimination, of no birth, of no death, of no being and of no non-being."

Practice like a wave. Take the time to look deeply into yourself and recognize that your nature is the nature of no-birth and no-death. You can break through to freedom and fearlessness this way. This method of practice will help us to live without fear, and it will help us to die peacefully without regret.

If you carry within yourself deep grief, if you have lost a loved one, if you are inhabited by fear of death, oblivion and annihilation, please take up this teaching and begin to practice it. If you practice well, you will be capable of looking at the cloud, the rose, the pebble or your child with the kind of eyes the Buddha has transmitted to us. You will touch the no-birth, no-death, no-coming, no-going nature of reality. This can liberate you from your fear, from your anxiety and your sorrow. Then you can truly have the kind of peace that will

make you strong and stable, smiling as events happen. Living this way will allow you to help many people around you.

### *Where Were You Before You Were Born?*

Sometimes people ask you: "When is your birthday?" But you might ask yourself a more interesting question: "Before that day which is called my birthday, where was I?"

Ask a cloud: "What is your date of birth? Before you were born, where were you?"

If you ask the cloud, "How old are you? Can you give me your date of birth?" you can listen deeply and you may hear a reply. You can imagine the cloud being born. Before being born it was the water on the ocean's surface. Or it was in the river and then it became vapor. It was also the sun because the sun makes the vapor. The wind is there too, helping the water to become a cloud. The cloud does not come from nothing; there has been only a change in form. It is not a birth of something out of nothing.

Sooner or later the cloud will change into rain or snow or ice. If you look deeply into the rain, you can see the cloud. The cloud is not lost; it is transformed into rain, and the rain is transformed into grass and the grass into cows and then to milk and then into the ice cream you eat. Today if you eat an ice cream, give yourself time to look at the ice cream and say:

"Hello, cloud! I recognize you." By doing that, you have insight and understanding into the real nature of the ice cream and the cloud. You can also see the ocean, the river, the heat, the sun, the grass and the cow in the ice cream.

Looking deeply, you do not see a real date of birth and you do not see a real date of death for the cloud. All that happens is that the cloud transforms into rain or snow. There is no real death because there is always a continuation. A cloud continues the ocean, the river and the heat of the sun, and the rain continues the cloud.

Before it was born, the cloud was already there, so today, when you drink a glass of milk or a cup of tea or eat an ice cream, please follow your breathing. Look into the tea or the ice cream and say hello to the cloud.

The Buddha took the time to look deeply and so can we. The Buddha was not a God; he was a human being like us. He suffered, but he practiced, and that is why he overcame his suffering. He had deep understanding, wisdom and compassion. That is why we say he is our teacher and our brother.

If we are afraid of death it is because we have not understood that things do not really die. People say that the Buddha is dead, but it is not true. The Buddha is still alive. If we look around us we can see the Buddha in many forms. The Buddha is in you because you have been able to look deeply and see that things are not really born and that they do not

die. We can say that you are a new form of the Buddha, a continuation of the Buddha. Do not underestimate yourself. Look around you a little bit and you will see continuations of the Buddha everywhere.

### *Am I Yesterday's Me?*

I have a photograph of myself when I was a boy of sixteen. Is it a photograph of me? I am not really sure. Who is this boy in the photograph? Is it the same person as me or is it another person? Look deeply before you reply.

There are many people who say that the boy in the photograph and I are the same. If that boy is the same as I am, why does he look so different? Is that boy still alive or has he died? He is not the same as I am and he is also not different. Some people look at that photograph and think the young boy there is no longer around.

A person is made of body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness, and all of these have changed in me since that photograph was taken. The body of the boy in the photograph is not the same as my body, now that I am in my seventies. The feelings are different, and the perceptions are very different. It is just as if I am a completely different person from that boy, but if the boy in the photograph did not exist, then I would not exist either.

I am a continuation like the rain is the continuation of the cloud. When you look deeply into the photograph, you can see me already as an old man. You do not have to wait fifty-five years. When the lemon tree is in flower, you may not see any fruit, but if you look deeply you can see that the fruit is already there. You just need one more condition to bring forth the lemons: time. Lemons are already there in the lemon tree. Look at the tree and you only see branches, leaves and flowers. But if the lemon tree has time it will express itself in lemons.

### *Sunflowers in April*

If you come to France in April, you will not see any sunflowers. But in July the area around Plum Village has so many sunflowers. Where are the sunflowers in April? If you come to Plum Village in April and look deeply, you will see sunflowers. The farmers have ploughed the land and sown the seed, and the flowers are just waiting for one more condition to show themselves. They are waiting for the warmth of May and June. The sunflowers are there, but they have not fully manifested.

Look deeply at a box of matches. Do you see a flame in it? If you do, you are already enlightened. When we look

deeply at a box of matches, we see that the flame is there. It needs only the movement of someone's fingers to manifest. We say: "Dear flame, I know you are there. Now I shall help you express yourself."

The flame has always been in the box of matches and also in the air. If there were no oxygen, the flame could not express itself. If you lit a candle and then covered the flame with something, the flame would go out for lack of oxygen. The survival of the flame depends on oxygen. We cannot say that the flame is inside the box of matches or that the flame is outside the box of matches. The flame is everywhere in space, time and consciousness. The flame is everywhere, waiting to manifest itself, and we are one of the conditions that will help the flame to manifest. However, if we blow on the flame we shall help the flame stop showing itself. Our breath, when we blow on the flame, is a condition that stops the manifestation of the flame in its flame form.

We can light two candles from the match and then blow out the flame on the match. Do you think the flame from the match has died? The flame is not of the nature to be born or to die. The question is, is the flame on the two candles the same flame or two different flames? It is not the same and it is not different. Now another question: is the flame of the match dead? It is both dead and not dead. Its nature is not to die and not to be born. If we leave the candle burning for an

hour, will the flame remain the same or become another flame? The wick, the wax and the oxygen are always changing. The part of the wick and the wax that is burning is always transforming. If these things transform, the flame must change too. So the flame is not the same, but it also is not different.

*Being Is Not the Opposite of Annihilation*

We have an idea of being that it is the opposite of not being. These ideas are no more solid than ideas of right and left. Look at a pen. Can we remove totally its right-hand side? If we use a knife and cut away half of the pen, the part that remains still has a right-hand side. Political parties of the right and the left are immortal—they cannot be removed. As long as there is a right wing, there will be a left wing.

Therefore those on the left of the political spectrum should desire the eternal presence of those on the right. If we remove the right, we have to remove the left at the same time. The Buddha said: "This is because that is. This manifests because that has manifested." This is the Buddha's teaching concerning the creation of the world. It is called the teaching on co-arising. The flame is there because the

matches are there. If the matches were not there, the flame would not be there.

*The Answer Lies Within*

Where does the flame come from? What is its origin? We should look deeply into this question. Do you need to sit in the lotus position to find the answer? I am sure that the answer is already in you. It is just waiting for one more condition to manifest itself. The Buddha said that everyone has Buddha nature in them. Buddha nature is the ability to understand and touch our real nature. The answer is already in you. A teacher cannot give you the answer. A teacher can help you be in touch with the awakened nature, the great understanding and compassion in you. The Buddha invites you to be in touch with the wisdom that is already in you.

Many of us ask: "Where do you go when you die? What happens when you die?" We have friends who have lost someone they love and they ask: "Where is my beloved one now? Where has she gone now?" Philosophers ask: "Where does man come from? Where does the cosmos or the world come from?"

When we look deeply, we see that when all the conditions are sufficient something will manifest. What manifests



does not come from anywhere. And when a manifestation ceases, it does not go anywhere.

### *Creation*

“To create” seems to mean that from nothing you suddenly have something. I prefer the use of the expression “manifestation” to the word “creation.” Look deeply, and you can understand creation in terms of manifestation. Just as we can understand a cloud as a manifestation of something that has always been there, and rain as the end of the cloud manifestation, we can understand human beings, and even everything around us, as a manifestation that has come from somewhere and will go nowhere. Manifestation is not the opposite of destruction. It simply changes form. Understanding our lives and the cosmos as a manifestation can bring us tremendous peace. If you are grieving over the loss of a loved one, this is an invitation to look deeply and to heal your pain.

There are theologians who have said that God is the ground of being, but what being? It is not the being that is opposed to non-being. If it is the notion of being as opposed to non-being, then that is not God. God transcends all notions, including the notions of creation and destruction. If you look deeply at the notion of creation with the insight of

manifestation in mind, you will discover the depth of the teaching on creation. You will discover that nothing is born and nothing dies. There is only manifestation.

### *Finding Relief*

We come to spiritual practice, to a church, a synagogue, a mosque or a meditation center, to find relief from pain and sorrow. But the greatest relief can only be obtained when we are capable of touching the ultimate dimension. In Judaism and in Christianity you may call that dimension God. God is our true nature, the true nature of no birth, no death. That is why if you know how to trust God, to trust your true nature, you will lose your fear and sorrow.

In the beginning you might think of God as a person, but a person is the opposite of a non-person. If you think of God in terms of notions and concepts, you have not yet discovered the reality of God. God transcends all our notions. God is neither a person nor a non-person. A wave in her ignorance is subject to the fear of birth, death, high, low, more or less beautiful, and the jealousy of others. But if a wave is able to touch her true nature, the nature of water, and know that she is water, then all her fear and jealousy will vanish. Water doesn't undergo birth and death, high and low.

*Causes*

When we look at things like a flower, a table or a house, we think that a house has to be made by someone and a table has to be made by someone in order to be there. Our tendency is to look for a cause that has given birth to the house, a cause that has given birth to the table. We come to the conclusion that the cause of the house must be the house builder: the mason or the carpenter. What is the cause of the table? Who created the table? A carpenter. Who is the creator of the flower? Is it the earth or the farmer or the gardener?

In our minds we think very simply in terms of cause. We think that one cause is enough to bring about what is there. With the practice of looking deeply we find out that one cause can never be enough in order to bring about an effect. The carpenter is not the only cause of the table. If the carpenter does not have things like nails, saw, wood, time and space, food to eat, a father and mother who brought him to life and a multitude of conditions, he would not be able to bring the table into being. The causes are actually infinite.

When we look at the flower we see the same thing. The gardener is only one of the causes. There must be the soil, the sunshine, the cloud, the compost, the seed and many, many other things. If you look deeply, you will see that the

whole cosmos has come together in order to help the flower to manifest. If you look deeply into a piece of carrot that you eat at lunch, you will see that the whole cosmos has come together in order to help manifest that piece of carrot.

If we continue to look deeply, we see that a cause is at the same time an effect. The gardener is one of the causes that has helped to manifest the flower, but the gardener is also an effect. The gardener has manifested because of other causes: ancestors, father, mother, teacher, job, society, food, medicine and shelter. Like the carpenter, he is not only a cause, he is also an effect.

Looking deeply, we find that every cause is at the same time an effect. There cannot be something that we can call "pure cause." There are many things we can discover with the practice of looking deeply, and if we are not bound to any dogma or concept we will be free to make our discoveries.

*No Pure Cause*

When the Buddha was asked, "What is the cause of everything?" he answered with very simple words. He said, "This is, because that is." It means that everything relies on everything else in order to manifest. A flower has to rely on non-flower elements in order to manifest. If you look deeply into the flower, you can recognize non-flower elements. Looking

into the flower, you recognize the element sunshine; that is a non-flower element. Without sunshine, a flower cannot manifest. Looking at the flower, you recognize the element cloud; that is a non-flower element. Without clouds, the flower cannot manifest. Other elements are essential, such as minerals, soil, the farmer and so on; a multitude of non-flower elements has come together in order to help the flower manifest.

This is why I prefer the expression "manifestation" to the word "creation." This does not mean that we should not use the word "creation." Of course we can do so, but we should understand that creation does not mean making something out of nothing. Creation is not something that is destroyed and can become nothing. I very much like the term "Wonderful Becoming." It is close to the true meaning of creation.

Three

THE PRACTICE  
OF LOOKING  
DEEPLY



