

The following are notes used by Craig Hannah for a short dharma talk on 12/16/2017 covering part 1 (of 2) of Thich Nhat Hanh's book Finding Our True Home - Living in the Pure Land Here and Now

Finding Our True Home - Living in the Pure Land Here and Now

By Thich Nhat Hanh



- **Preface: The Pure Land is Now or Never, by sister Anabel Laity**
 - Very often Thich Nhat Hanh offers a calligraphy in English which reads: 'The Pure Land is Now or Never'
 - Your Pure Land is available now, and if you cannot walk there now there is very little guarantee that you will be able to walk there when you die."
- **Part 1: Practicing in the Pure Land**
 - **Where is the Pure Land?**
 - The Smaller Amitabha Sutra was written at a time when practitioners were trying to widen the scope of the teachings
 - Tells of Buddha Amitabha and the Land of Great Happiness that he created
 - Do not lose yourself in 'deep theories and speculations' when reading it.

- Read it in the spirit of living in the present moment
- **Our Deepest Aspiration**
 - A Pure Land is a secure place of love and understanding, it is not necessarily an 'exterior reality'
- **The Making of the Pure Land**
- **What Pollutes Our Land**
 - Do not allow base thoughts to pollute your Pure Land
- **Listening to the Trees**
 - Our pure presence in the Pure Land creates and contributes to it
 - "A Pure Land is a collective creation"
 - We can create our Pure Land now, even in this saha world (the impure world)
- **The Three Levels of Practice**
 - **The Highest Level of Practice: Pure Land in the Mind and Body**
 - Our actions and our life will follow our thoughts. Recollecting the Buddha is the meditative practice of recollecting the wholesome so that we progress on the path of right action.
 - **The Dharma Body**
 - The dharma body is the teaching body. "There are two kinds: the living dharma and the dharma that is written or recorded. Whenever we breathe peacefully, walk in meditation then this is the living dharma. Another meaning is our own practice – each one of us has a physical body and if we are a disciple of the Buddha then we also have a dharma body. The practice body. As students of the Buddha, we have the capacity to generate joy and happiness." (From a Plum Village talk by Chan Niem Hy on Jan. 13, 2014)
 - The Pure Land may lie in the west, but since we are the dharma body and the dharma body is Buddha Amitabha, **it also lies in us.**
 - **The Eternally Silent Night**
 - Our true mind is our Dharma body; It is silent and without words and so is not caught in ideas and expressions.

- "The one who recollects and the one who is recollected are one" The Buddha is not external to us - the Buddha is in us.
- **The Middle Level of Practice: Wholesome Recollection**
 - Wholesome recollection of the Buddha is needed to realize the concepts of impermanence and no-self, but should not be held too tightly. The concepts contain their opposites (inter-are) and should be used as tools to take us beyond concepts.
 - **Returning Home to Our Mind**
 - The goal of practice at this level is to reach a state of continual mindfulness of the present moment and of Amitabha and the Pure Land.
- **The Lowest Level of Practice: Aspiring to Be Born in the Pure Land**
 - Images and sounds are used to aid one's recollection and mindfulness of Buddha and the Pure Land
- **Practicing Nondiscrimination on the Path of Awakening**
 - The level of practice used is whatever is appropriate for the situation. None are better, none are worse.
- **Applying the Three Levels of Practice to Other Faiths**
 - The three levels could be considered analogous to the Abrahamic religions ideas of the Kingdom of God:
 - Only being available after death (the lowest level)
 - Observing the wholesome life trying to bring paradise to the here and now (the middle level)
 - Living the present moment in the Kingdom of God (the highest level)
- **Not Caught in Ideas of Higher or Lower**
 - All levels are equally good. They benefit ourselves and serve as examples to others.
- **The Nine Lotus Grades**
 - A belief is that the Pure Land has 9 levels of lotuses. One sits on a level depending on one's level of holiness.
 - The levels are not punitive, but simply descriptive. If we are in the lowest of the low, it's because we are only slightly awake.
 - Recollecting Amitabha with sincerity and attention while in the Saha world causes a lotus bud to appear in the Pure Land. This is our lotus.

- **Our Happiness Depends on Us**
 - The levels in the Pure Land are similar to one sangha member being caught in thoughts while another transcends them.
- **Taking Refuge in Our Community of Practice**
 - Being in a sangha doesn't mean we won't have problems. We need to work and grow to surmount those problems.
 - We need to develop clarity to see what is true.
- **The Degree of Happiness**
 - Being in a lower state in the Pure Land simply means you still have seeds of suffering within you.
- **Looking for Our Promised Land**
 - Our life now and our life in the Pure Land contain each other - They are not separate.
 - We are told that the promised land is in the future because we don't believe that is now. It is available to us as soon as we are available to it.
 - We create our objects of veneration (e.g. God, Buddha, Heaven, the Pure Land) and our representations of them (e.g. symbols, statues) outside of us.
 - Recognizing that what we perceive as outside of us arises from inside of us changes everything.
- **Beyond the Notion of Within and Without**
 - Initially we see Buddha as something outside of us. After some practice we realize that Buddha is within us. Eventually we see that Buddha just is. Inside and outside are just concepts that don't really apply in this case.
 - When seeking the Buddha or the Pure Land we are, in truth, seeking ourselves.
- **A Small Lotus Bud is Blooming in Our Hearts**
 - Reciting the Buddha's name causes a lotus bud to appear in the Pure Land. Earnest, continued practice causes it to grow. While it appears in Buddha Land, it also appears in your heart.
 - This lotus of peace, joy, and freedom here for you now.
- **The Meditation School¹ and the Pure Land School² Are One**
 - Meditation as taught in the Satipatthana and Anapanasati sutra is a technique of "dwelling happily in the present moment" or "drishta dharma sukha viharin" in Sanskrit. This

means that happiness is possible now - the Pure Land is possible now.

- Pure Land techniques coupled with meditation are very close to the original teachings of the Buddha.
- **Enjoying Our Flower in the Present**
 - "The mind is like a painter who paints all phenomenon". Just as we create the hell realms, we can create the Pure Land.
- **The Bodhisattvas Are Children of the Earth**
 - We may have difficulty recognizing it, but there is a bohisattva in each of us. It may not yet be fully manifested, but nevertheless, it is there.
- **A Pure Land for the Present**
 - "Pure Land without meditation
Is a Pure Land of the future,
Our mind is a land of purity
Meditation and Pure Land are not two."
 - With meditation, the Pure Land can change from an eternal longing or superstition to a very realistic doctrine.
- **You don't Need to Die to enter the Kingdom of Heaven**
 - Practicing mindfulness and recognizing that our true nature is Amitabha Buddha, we can live in the Pure Land now.

¹ Meditation School (According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy's article of Chan Buddhism)

- The Meditation school is synonymous with both Chan and Zen.
- The Chan School (Chan zong) is an indigenous form of Chinese Buddhism that developed beginning in the sixth century CE and subsequently spread to the rest of East Asia (Japanese: Zen; Korean: Sôn; Vietnamese; Thiền).
- Chan means meditation or meditative state so Chan zong can be translated as the "Meditation School".
- Chan was not distinctive within Chinese Buddhism in its use of meditative techniques. What distinguished Chan were its novel use of language, its development of new narrative forms, and its valorization of the direct and embodied realization of Buddhist awakening

² Pure Land Buddhism (Cribbed from the WP article on Pure Land Buddhism)

- Pure Land Buddhism is a broad branch of Mahayana Buddhism. Pure Land oriented practices and concepts are found within basic Mahāyāna Buddhist cosmology, and form an important component of the Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions.
- The term "Pure Land Buddhism" is used to describe both:
 - The Pure Land soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which may be better understood as "Pure Land traditions" or "Pure Land teachings,"
 - The separate Pure Land sects that developed in Japan from the work of Hōnen.

- Pure Land Buddhism is built on the belief that we will never have a world which is not corrupt, so we must strive for re-birth in another plane, referred to as the "Pure Land".